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ONE SHILLING.

THE

NIGHT MAIL

ITS PASSENGERS

AND

HOW THEY FARED AT CHRISTMAS



LONDON:

WARD & LOCK: FLEET STREET

MDCCCLXII

THE
NIGHT MAIL

ITS PASSENGERS

AND HOW THEY FARED AT CHRISTMAS

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD

LONDON
WARD AND LOCK, FLEET STREET
MDCCCLXII

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THE NIGHT MAIL.



I.

ALL alone in the public room of the house of entertainment known as the Old Rodney Arms, I never felt so dismal in my life before. It had been sleeting in this part of the town since yesterday morning,—the waiter said;—might change to snow that night, or go on with sleet for a week more. On the whole, he rather thought it was as good as set in.

There was nothing to cheer a man in this. There was nothing to cheer one in the room, which was after the penitentiary and silent-system model; with its chilling whitewash, sawdust, spittoons, pipes laid saltierwise over the chimney-piece, and other fittings of the true tavern order. Nothing to cheer one in the prospect from the window, of the stable-yard fast turning into a pond; of ducks paddling riotously; of the little heaps of straw floating down the current of thawed sleet; of the poor cur whose house was now being invaded by the flood. Nothing to cheer one in the dripping ostler, exercising his functions on a dripping horse just come in. Nothing in the overcharged spouts, all now dripping, now pouring into the yard. Put to it, finally,

that he who was so looking from the window of the Old Rodney Arms was an exile newly returned, without a friend in the wide world beyond the captain of the ship that brought him home, and you have as cheerless a picture of solitary wretchedness as need be.

Still sleeting on languidly; but with a purpose that shows it to be in good heart for work—a fitting accompaniment for the high festival now approaching. For this is the vigil of Christmas-eve; and as all the world has learnt in its nursery, Christmas comes but once a year, And when it comes it brings good cheer. There were famous elements in my case to render this a truly inspiring anniversary;—that is to say, twenty-one hard years in a foreign land, parents dead, wife dead, and two elder brothers dropping off one after another, leaving behind them the old family heritage of Mytton Grange, now fallen to me, Nicholas Sherburne, last of an old line. No one that knew me as a child left; all gone, scattered and passed away!

About this time there appeared at the door of the public room the old waiter, muttering something in thin wheezy accents; the same who had given such doubtful testimony as to the sleet. There was a sea-captain below, he said, wanting me. No doubt, this was Captain Sharon, of the *William Clay* (set down in the bills of the ship's sailing as that Well-known and Experienced commander), who had appointed to meet me at the Old Rodney Arms; a favourite house of call with gentlemen of his profession. A rough man, and a ready man, this Well-known and Experienced commander, with his heart in the right place, people said.

He entered with a great stamp, bringing in the sleet along with him.

"Hallo, my hearty," says Captain Sharon from afar off; he might have been on his own quarter-deck, speaking through his trumpet. "How is the tide with you now? Heavy-hearted still? Bad, bad to give in to those lows; bad for soul and body. I never knew good come of it."

"I am not in the lows, Captain Sharon," I said, affecting a sort of jollity of manner; "I am getting quite into spirits."

"So best," said Captain Sharon, "I never knew good come of the dumps. Now, what I have to say is this: will you come aboard with me to-night, and bear me company down the river? A good berth and rations accordingly. 'For the ship shall sail, and the wind is fair,'" added Captain Sharon, chanting.

"No sooner come home than sent abroad again," I said. "What a queer world this is!"

"Ay," said Captain Sharon, "take it as you find it. Will you come? Drop down to-night; and I'll put you ashore to-morrow evening in time for Christmas-day and plum-pudding with your friends."

I laughed bitterly. "Friends! I like that; why, my good Captain, I have not a friend in the world."

Captain Sharon gnawed his under lip reflectively. "I am not going to deny," he said at length, "that this is a poor way for a man to be in. But I tell you plainly, if it was my case, I'd not stay growling in my hammock. I'd get up and work, and look about me. And, if I had not a friend in the world," said that Well-

known and Experienced commander, turning quite red in the face, to explode a thumping oath, "I'd go and make 'em."

"Make them?" I said, mechanically.

"Ay, make 'em, and plenty of 'em, too. You have money, and lands, and a great house. Well, I'd go down and fill the great house,—I would—I'd take my hat full of cards and go round to squire and parson, and the whole crew. No friends!" here Captain Sharon laughed scornfully; "you have plenty of 'em at this living instant. I'd take my oath of it."

For a single moment, it struck me there might be some grains of wisdom in what the sea-captain had said; but I looked up at the window and the dull sky, and they were straight washed away in floods of sleet.

"I must go," said the captain, buttoning on his rough coat. "Will you come?—No? Well, you're wiser to my mind for staying. Take to the country and your own fire of a Christmas-day. Good by." With that the rough and ready man passed out into the sleet.

II.

His was good and well-meant counsel; but such as I was not yet fitted to take home to myself. Still there kept sounding in my ear with a certain melodious clang those rough notes of the captain. Make yourself friends! Ah, 'tis not too late. For a Christmas dream and a Christmas hearth, no, 'tis not too late! All that day it went on clanging on, chiming quarter and half-hour and three-quarter bells in my ear to the same

tune. The bells of old churches hard by seemed to take up that shape of melody, swinging out that old burden, Make yourself friends! Ah, no, 'tis not too late—no, 'tis not too late! But such things were not for me. The bleak walls and cold desolation of the Old Rodney Arms were fitter, and more in keeping: so I fell back into the old up-and-down patrol, looking out now and again from the window. The dripping ostler as before; the dripping horse as before; stable-yard fast becoming navigable. Four o'clock being told off by the chimes of the neighbouring churches; with which jostle discordantly those other chimes of Captain Sharon's. It was clearing a very little in the west, just beyond the red chimneys; and it suddenly enters into my head to go out and see human faces again, and be set free, for a time at least, from those hateful white walls. With that, I go forth into the sleet, as the captain had done before me, and take the road city-wards.

There was a house of business in that quarter to which I had letters, lying up a small dark court, with its style and calling set out on brass-plates at one side. Inside, it found room for other houses of business, each with its own flight and its own brass-plate. Unhappily, the chief was absent—a little old man, very gray and shrivelled, being left in charge—gone down for the Christmas by that morning's early mail, to return by that day week at furthest. The little old man, very gray and shrivelled, ventures to presume that I and many more will be going down that night or following morning.

"A very pleasant thing must be that Christmas in the country," he says, looking thoughtfully on the fire, and fitting his thin fingers together. "Very pleasant for such as had means. Very pleasant!"

Would he be going too?

Dear no! dear no! He had not been out of London these forty years back. Most likely never should—never should. Was just about locking up and going out to look at the streets. It was so curious looking at the streets of these nights. People seemed so busy and so happy.

I left him there, still doing joiner's work with his poor lean fingers over the fire, and went back again through those streets he spoke of. The lonely waiter's prophecy had come true; for the sleet had departed, and it now looked very much as if it were about to snow. By this time it had grown dark, and the lamps were lighted. There was a hum of voices abroad, and two floods of dark figures hurrying by, on some purpose bent. Shop-windows were throwing out dazzling effulgence, reflected brightly from the many little shining pools and ponds in the road; where, too, were reflected cheerfully-flaring lamps and flitting forms. Specially round certain sheets of effulgence—throwing out a glare as from open furnace-doors—were gathered crowds of admiring figures and illuminated faces viewing the huge stores within: the holly within: the white-capped and white-robed attendants within: the dispensing of rare Christmas cheer; and the file of buyers incoming and outgoing. With a far more delighted amphitheatre of glowing faces round certain

other sheets of effulgence—temples of confectionery—feasting their eyes on the spreading Christmas-tree and its glittering fruit of gold and silver, card and ribbon : on the huge white cakes rising like towers : on the gaudy vista reflected by mirrors many times over, down towards the far end, of men and women packing busily, fitting the snow cake and Christmas-tree fruit into cases—going down to the country that night.

Where shall that tree be set up? What troop of children, far down in some well-wooded English county, be gladdened at its coming? More glare from open furnace-doors—more glowing faces—more trees—more busy packing. I am jostled by hasty men on Christmas errands. I am put aside by men bearing Christmas packages, and nearly run down by heavy wains laden with strong ales for Christmas drinking. Every body seems to have Christmas business but my poor lonely self. Getting absorbed in contending floods, I am taken up through many by-streets into one of the great markets, where gas is flaring nakedly, bringing out a gaunt Rembrandtish effect: where, too, is Christmas food in the bulk, raw material of coming cheer in huge massive heaps, of which are there sellers in bulk, and buyers in bulk. Sellers entrenched strongly behind groaning counters and mounds of provision; behind monster poultry suspended high; behind primest joints: all with Christmas purpose. Dark foliage overhead of shining green-necked birds newly arrived from those richly wooded counties—with Christmas purpose. Flocks of wild birds, armies of great fowl,—with Christmas purpose. Buyers gauging monster

poultry, appraising the height and depth of their fatness—with Christmas purpose. Sellers giving out ceaselessly, taking in ceaselessly, with Christmas purpose. Housewives, hand in pocket, reflectively taking thought of what store they needed; not so much caring for hard-bargains on this eve; thinking, with glistening eye, how little Tom, or Jack, or Harry, now on his way home, would be gathered round her cheer—whose little hearts would be set a-dancing at this sight. Perhaps, even the dripping ostler, after change of his damp garments, had been up here with Christmas purpose. Groves of holly and ivy with Christmas purpose. Every body, every thing, with Christmas purpose, beyond myself; who was now wandering utterly purposeless, cut off from any Christmas hope and prospect and purpose whatsoever. Here Captain Sharon's bells fell on to a chiming, chiming out their old tunes; over and over again they rang out: "Make yourself friends! Ah, no! 'tis not too late—no! 'tis not too late. For Christmas dreaming and Christmas hearth, 'tis not too late—no! 'tis not too late!"

Only this time, so furiously, so importunately flinging Captain Sharon's music abroad, that, when I looked on the scene before me, and on all who were going and coming with light hearts under their cloaks, I felt of a sudden an intolerable yearning to be of that happy company. Nor did that possibility seem altogether so hopeless and remote. "'Tis not too late—no! 'tis not too late!" clanged the bells riotously. What if I tried? Something seemed to whisper to

me, timidly, it could do no harm—perhaps no good—perhaps a little good—and, as the thought came upon me, I found my heart beating faster, and my steps quickening, as I hurried along towards home. Such a home as I might find within the bleak walls of the Old Rodney Arms.

I had half made up my mind. With a nervous fluttering, I laid out a sort of programme; a dusky castle in the air. What if I left the Old Rodney Arms far behind me, and fled away through the broad English lands northward—journeying down to Mytton Grange, the ancestral seat of the Sherburnes? I half made up my mind; and, one look at the bleak, whitened walls of the Rodney Arms finished the work. I would go.

As I came to this resolve, the bells of Captain Sharon ceased ringing and were heard no more.

III.

The night mail went down at half-past eight o'clock, and towards that hour I was on the threshold of a huge iron-way that strikes off north-westerly. Very great was the bustle that attended on the departure of the night-train. A great clatter, and in-driving and out-driving by different gates processionally. A dazzling flare of lamps in long lines down the platform, converging to points far away; long lines of pillars; lines of sombre carriages in the gloom by themselves, like unemployed hearses; lines of emblazoned advertising; all converging also to points afar off. Many passengers by this night's mail north-westerly, furnished with

hairy rugging against the cold of these Christmas nights, with bags slung round them, following their baggage, now being trundled by strong men along the platform. All—mostly all—going down for the Christmas. Men of business, men of politics, men of law, hurrying down north-westerly for the Christmas.

Busy time for the trader at his book-cupboard; simultaneously taking and changing moneys, cutting leaves, folding his broad-sheets, now reeking from the printing laundry, under desperate pressure. Busy time for the strong men carrying burdens and swinging up monstrous chests and cases to other strong men on the roof-top, to be packed close under warm tarpaulin covering. Busy time, too, for the Arctic voyagers, still pouring from the flood gates, hurrying past open doors, pushing on for some far-off point.

Now with bell jangling out, and a short dropping fire of closing cabin-doors, and low hollow rumble, and jerk and rattle of bolts from beneath—the train of blue-cushioned chambers glides swiftly on; by the long waste of platform; by the strong men standing at intervals; and, with sudden extinguishment of the broad golden splashes, passes into Erebus! Passes into Erebus with a long wailing scream far on in front, and a dull droning burr, as of a machine winnowing eternally at each window.

The feeble yellow light overhead, reflected on the dull blue cloth, falls on five indistinct figures, fellow cabin passengers, all swathed close in rough, heavy blanketing, whose heads, sunk over their damp

paper, swing from side to side harmoniously, in isochronous beats. There was to be found a dismal entertainment and distraction in speculating on these muffled figures. Two opposite, under whose seat had been pushed in long leathern cases, of peculiar and significant shape, were surely shooting men. Light-souled, fresh-cheeked fellows, who had busy work all the year round in chambers, now journeying down, on Christmas furlough, to some boisterous manor-house. Whence, for a week to come, they shall go forth every morning with squire and squire's party seeking sport: creeping by the edge of frozen lakes; brushing snow-charged trees and hedges; returning home late, to light, and warmth, and festivity, and abundant company. Happy shooting men!

The heavy, square-shouldered passenger beside me, whose genial face positively shines out from under his Arctic cap, I could not dissociate from the fancy of a cheerful horn. His lips, indeed, at times roundly distending, physically conformed to the bell-shaped aperture of such an instrument; and when he asked his neighbour, who was painfully searching out some date or route in his well-known yellow railway dictionary, "What time now might we be due, sir, at Bingley Junction?" it seemed as if a ringing inspiring blast had been sounded in the carriage. Which question, the owner of the yellow volume, who was of a shaven, monastic cut, applies himself, with much painful labour, to answer, and for the next quarter of an hour I can see is floundering miserably in the slough of figures, tables, and references, into which that will-o'-the-wisp

is sure to lead the unskilful. Cheerful Horn protests it is no matter—none in the world; but the monastic traveller has now taken his book close under the lamp, and *will* see to the end of the business; still searching and poring over his breviary, when we become conscious of a gradual slackening of our speed.

“Station, sir? Hey, sir—station now?” sang out the Cheerful Horn in his bugle voice.

The monastic traveller—with a finger between the leaves of his book to mark the place—was at the window, anxiously striving to peer into Erebus. Now he was fluttering his leaves, now at Erebus again.

“Very odd—very strange!” he said at last; “there must have been some accident—a breakdown of the machinery, possibly. We are about being run into by a heavy goods train!”

“God bless my soul!” said Cheerful Horn, starting; “what makes you think so?”

“There is no station set down,” said the monastic traveller, “until you get to—to—let me see—”

There was a cold, dried business man sitting nearly opposite, who made the sixth cabin passenger, and he, without lifting his head from his financial journal, said, in a hard, quiet, clipping tone, “Market-Ashton.”

“No,” said the monastic traveller, with his book still held to the lamp, “this is not Market-Ashton; I find a bold line drawn across exactly under Market-Ashton; and, on turning to the table of abbreviations, I find that a bold line drawn across signifies—h’m!—that is—rather I should say—no, it can’t be that!”

"That the train goes no further," said the business man, still without lifting his eyes; "that proves a little too much."

"God bless my soul!" sang out Cheerful Horn again.

"You are looking," continued the business man, "at column five instead of column six. The parliamentary train, I believe, goes no farther than Market-Ashton."

Doubtfully, and only half convinced, the owner of the breviary retires from the lamp into his canon's stall, to sift the matter at his leisure. That slackening of speed was but a feint. We work up again to full speed. The winnowing goes on with extra power. The blue cabin bounds over the ground; the canons are rudely swung and shaken in their stalls. I hear the shooting men talking with an infinite zest of a place known as Harrowdale Hall, and of a squire known familiarly as Old Harrow, and of Old Harrow's daughters, and what famous tingling weather it will be down there; and they rub their hands together with a keen enjoyment, and fold their heavy rugging about their knees. Happy shooting men! I think to myself again; which sets me off by contrast upon a dismal, lonely reverie—winnowing very busy and monotonous now.

I hear Cheerful Horn's voice breaking in upon me at intervals with a metallic ring. He is upon the old coaching days—fine, as he calls them; upon the famous fast conveyances, Lightnings, Highflyers, and Goby's, and their superb teams so well known upon

the York road; upon the skilful drivers, not, strictly speaking, within the pale of the profession, but amateur outsiders; upon popular guards, and upon the noble points, generally, of that fine, old, uncomfortable, and now happily effete, mode of conveyance; which congenial subject takes up the two shooting men, away from Harrowdale Hall, and drifts them into the discussion. Which clang and hum of voices crossing that under current of reverie, together with that busy winnowing just by my ear, sends me into a sort of dreamy wakefulness—upon which breaks, every now and then, a sharp wordy blast, that makes me start.

“No adventures on the road, now,” I hear Cheerful Horn saying, with a sort of despondency; “they are gone out. Why, in old times, a coaching journey positively ran over with ’em. It was a travelling green-room, full of properties and dramatic points. There were bold captains and sparks, and widows and rich orphans,—heiresses, that is,—and runaway marriages, and pursuits, and rescues, to say nothing of highwaymen, and stopping the mail. Bless my soul!” continued Cheerful Horn, in a perfect heat with his enumeration, “if the whole thing didn’t bristle with incident!”

“I don’t know,” said the business man, clipping his verbal coinage fearfully; “you scarcely carry me with you so far. As far as I can see, there is no reason why those very elements should not be with us now—in *posse*, I think the logical people call it—in this very train, within the four sides of this compartment. Excepting—h’m! of course, I except—that highwayman element. The fact is, the mind—h’m! the human mind

—is independent of local scenery, and takes about with it its own properties, scenery, and—h'm!—decorations. It only needs another actor, in the shape—h'm!—of another—h'm!—mind, and there you have the play all ready to begin.”

Cheerful Horn, I could see, did not grasp this explanation so well as he might have done less æsthetical matter, but gave in his adhesion nevertheless.

“Why, I myself,” continued the business man, neatly folding up his *Economist*,—“I myself, when travelling in France, not very many years ago, too, saw a whole play right through, the beginning and the end, all in a first-class carriage. The unities were strictly preserved, and the action within the period of a single night.”

Cheerful Horn—positively distending his cheeks with the vigour of his blast—said he should be very glad, very glad indeed, to hear about that. The shooting men travelled up once more from Harrowdale Hall, and, emerging partly from their rug-chrysalis, bent forward with a sort of curiosity. They were busy, too, with little leathern cases opening like pocket-books, and hoped that no one had any objection; if any one had, why, of course— No one did object.

“Nothing of a story,” said the business man, now tying up his *Economist* neatly with a view to posting it to another business man. Oh, no! nothing in the world of a story! He had no turn that way; but, as far as a plain simple statement of what he had seen went, they were welcome to *that*.

And I now give the Business Man's narrative;

—scarcely in his own words (of which he was very chary),—but with all the facts carefully preserved.

THE VELVET HOOD.

“I SHALL be late! I shall be late! Only ten minutes to the hour! Run, some one, and see what can Victor be doing with that valise. A child could carry it. Oh, oh, these rascals! These (something) French rascals!”

Words spoken by an infuriated Briton at the door of a grand hotel in a very grand Parisian street. He is bound for Marseilles by the night express; and is vainly seeking to have his mails brought down. The grand people of the Grand hotel (it was of All Nations and of copious flourish) are in the habit of doing things in their own way, and at their own time. So that the chances of that infuriated Briton's going down peacefully by night express, of that infuriated Briton's paying his cab-fare, taking through ticket, having his mails weighed, and being improperly assessed thereon, would have appeared ludicrously poor to unoccupied bystanders. Practically speaking, he might have been taken to be out of the betting altogether—perhaps scratched.

“Will no one seek that fellow and the valise? O (here suppressed oath) execrable canaille! laziest crew! I must bring it down myself!”

A sympathising fille de chambre, leaning against the door, observes: “How cruel!—Jacques has deplorable lungs, the boy! ’Twill kill him, laying these heavy burdens on him.”

The infuriated Briton darts past her with look of defiance, and meets his valise—constructed to be carried in the hand—borne arduously by two men. He snatches it from them, and bears it down himself. Then bids Cocher, if he would love double fare, drive like five hundred devils. Cocher, lashing his steed furiously, swears profanely that he will drive like five hundred thousand of those condemned spirits—adding, that his pace shall be as the residence of those unhappy beings. The infuriated Briton leans him back in the vehicle, and is gradually tranquillised.

It may be as well confessed at once, that I was that excited foreigner, wishing, perhaps, through all that turbulent scene to veil my own proper personality under the thin disguise of a species of allegory. As I was borne away at the unholy pace promised,—now speeding round corners in arcs of fearfully small radius, now taking crossings with a bound as though they were leaps,—I began to find myself rising, as it were, in the betting, and to feel a yearning to hedge, if possible. A change of feeling, in a great measure owing to a certain yellow fiacre that kept steadily before us, describing the same fearful arcs, also taking the crossings like fences, and imperilling human life precisely in the same manner. The yellow fiacre might, in all probability, have had its unholy company, five hundred thousand strong, chartered and in yoke. To our charioteer it was a terrible rock-a-head, that yellow fiacre. Vainly did he strive to shoot past it by the right or by the left: destined to be always stopped by the adroit obstruction of yellow fiacre. Fearful were

his oaths when so checked : awful his round of imprecation. I noted, too, that a dark face, with black glossy moustaches, was put forth from the window every now and then, speaking words of encouragement, and glancing anxiously behind. So the yellow fiacre went on until both came clattering up to the railway-door ; the yellow fiacre leading to the very last, with just one minute to spare. Cocher and his five hundred thousand auxiliaries had deserved well of his fare, and there was joyfully counted out to him the promised bounty with handsome *pour-boire* to boot. Rushing past to secure a railway-ticket, I just catch a glimpse of the dark man—tall, well built, and in a richly braided cloak—helping out a lady in a cloak and hood.

During that precious three-quarters of a minute every thing must needs be done by express. Express taking of ticket—to takers a certain disadvantage in the matter of change ; express weighing of baggage per steel-yard ; also, it is to be feared, to owner's damnification ; there being a looseness in their fashion of appraising weight. It is hard to bring ourself to trust in that hasty click clack (sounds resulting from loading of the steel-yard), or in the wild chant that follows, "Dix-neuf ! q'rante !" or in the delivery of that blotted, sanded docket thrust through a little pigeon-hole. Express trundling, too, of the weighed mails along the platform, with express ringing of bells, and express jostling, and express seeking of vacant places ; much calling, much whistling, much shutting of doors ; and I am thrust hastily into a roomy carriage where there

are only two persons seated. The night express moves off with a shriek.

It was just beginning to grow dusk; but I could make out very plainly that one of the persons opposite had on a richly-braided cloak, and that his companion was a lady closely wrapped in a velvet hood. She kept far away in the corner, with the hood drawn over so as to hide her face. . A very handsome, martial personage, the man in the braided cloak; some brave doubtless, going southward with his wife. When we had grown a little accustomed to each other's faces, I should probably learn more of them. With that I look out the shining sea-green volume of the *chemin-de-fer* library (bought by express, and charged double accordingly), and begin to read. In that pleasant romance are soon forgotten all thoughts of the swarthy personage opposite, and of his delicate companion in the velvet hood.

From dusk to semi-darkness—from semi to Cimmerian darkness—and then progress in the little sea-green romance is stopped. Edouard, by ingenious reasoning, has just succeeded in convincing Marie that her lawful husband, besides being a tyrant, turnkey, gaoler, and filling other such ungrateful offices, is no other than a base impostor, forced upon her against her inclinations. That he (Edouard) is in the eye of justice, and bating a few ridiculous formalities, the true and lawful spouse, the other a low intruder. “*Ces pauvres enfans*,” continued the little sea-green romance— But here the darkness closed in effectually, and some one came tramping along overhead, dropping in lamp as he passed.

The yellow light streamed down full upon one of the faces opposite. A perfect Italian bandit's—dark, handsome, and with piercing black eyes that roved to and fro uneasily. The velvet hood was whispering earnestly to him, laying her hand upon the braided cloak, conjuring him or remonstrating as it seemed. But he kept turning his face away in the same uneasy fashion, looking towards me and the windows with much trouble of soul. Finally, he pushed her hand away roughly, and, covering up his face, groaned aloud.

I was half inclined to continue Edouard's and Marie's curious adventures; but here was a real flesh-and-blood narrative that promised to be infinitely more entertaining. If possible, I would read it through to the end.

"O malediction!" said the bandit quite aloud. "Malediction! You have brought me into all this! I shall never survive it! I shall die! We were doing well as we were! Oh!

"Courage, my friend," the Velvet-Hood said gently; "we are quite safe. No one can harm you."

"Harm me! if those two tigers track me out—Oh!"

"Hush, hush! my friend," the Velvet-Hood whispered, looking over uneasily at me.

With that they lowered their voices, and I could hear no more. I was driven in perforce on Edouard and Marie; which poor young people were now in fresh perplexities. I had left them sitting for whole days by the banks of a river, plaiting reciprocal garlands, and

trying their effect on each other's heads. Now it had come to this, that the turnkey, gaoler, or impostor-husband had been indiscreet enough to offer gentle remonstrances against this wholesale ignoring of himself. A partial recognition, he thought, was not unreasonable; he knew Monsieur Edouard's superior claims, but— Edouard and Marie will speak to him, will see the unhappy wretch together. They do speak to him with gentleness: for, though he has injured them deeply, they are above resentment. They show to him the impropriety of his conduct; they show him how wrong he has been. He is touched; he becomes conscious of his fault. The strong man is dissolved in tears.

“Courage!” says Marie, holding out her hand to him with a charming frankness. “Courage! you are forgiven—you will not offend again!”

“Never, never!” says the impostor-husband, falling on his knees and kissing her hand hysterically. Begs pardon, too, of Edouard; who promises to think no more about it. The wretched man is to be seen at the Morgue during all the next week, at any hour from ten till six. It preyed upon his mind—that feeling of having marred the happiness of two such angelic beings.

What with the dull yellow overhead and rumination on the sad catastrophe of the sea-green romance, the traveller begins to grow sleepy. Sleepy, even in despite of the hollow roaring outside, as though the ear were being held eternally to a gigantic shell; in despite of wild crashing through tunnels, and of wilder

swooping through stations, whose lamps, red and green, whose illuminated waiting-rooms, would all dart past like flashes of lightning; in despite of such alarums I begin to doze, and must have dozed and dreamed for a good round hour, when I wake up wearily, and my eyes light on the swarthy figure opposite, who is gesticulating wildly and talking loudly at the top of his voice. This time he was in a terrible rage, that swarthy bandit, eating his glossy moustaches with passion, and snarling dog-fashion. He was standing up too.

"I tell you, it was no other than you led me into this! You and your triply accursed wheedling."

"You know, dearest Carlo, whatever I may have said, I thought it would be for the best," the Velvet-Hood said. She seemed to be weeping.

"Ah! sorceress," he replied, between his teeth, "that smooth witch's tongue of yours! The two tigers will hunt us down,—that is, will hunt me down. And do you suppose they will spare me? No! they will kill me, like a dog: twice over, if they could! O mon dieu! mon dieu! it makes me tremble and shrink away to think of it." Here he fell back, and rolled on the seat in an agony of terror.

"Dear friend," said Velvet-Hood in that gentle tone of hers, "do not give way thus. They do not know at this moment that we have fled. We have escaped them entirely."

"And tell me this," he said, starting up, "whose was that face I saw at the half-opened jalousie? They were spying, the devils!"

"Imagination, dear friend."

"Woman's nonsense! I tell thee they are chasing us at this instant. They know it all, and woe to me if they find us."

"It is the last train, mon ami, Heaven be praised, so they must tarry until morning."

"Ay, but the brother is great with the postes and the police direction. What may not that do? Look to those long wires. Besides, O mon dieu! mon dieu! is there not a train some two or three hours later? O heavens! if there should be!"

"No, no," said the Velvet-Hood; "why disturb yourself with these delusions?"

"Monsieur is not asleep," he said, turning sharply on me. "Monsieur will set us right on the matter."

I was sure there was no such train; but fortunately had a railway guide with me. He consulted it greedily.

"There is, there is!" he said, with a sort of shriek. "Now we are lost, indeed! I shall die! Oh, I shall die!"

"Allow me to look," I said, taking it from him. He was right. There was a train that started some hour and half after the express train, but went no further than one half of the road. "The gentleman is right," I said. "There is a train not very far behind us now."

"O scélérate!" he said, turning on her and clutching her arm, "I could kill you this instant!"

She gave a short shriek.

"Have a care, sir," I said indignantly. "You must use the lady gently. I will suffer no violence in this carriage."

He cowered down and cringed. "No, no, Mon-

sieur, I did not so mean it. I have been much fretted; I have a great trouble on my mind." So they both relapsed into their whispering again.

What a curious mystery was here! A much more interesting mystery than that of Edouard and Marie, as set out in the sea-green romance. Something tragic, like enough, to come of it; which issue I was not to see, in all probability.

An hour past midnight by the clock, the figures being made out dimly by the yellow light. Here slackening of pace, and stray lights shooting by—signs as of nearing station. By the railway guide it is discovered that there is an important half-way house approaching: centre where lines meet and radiate away to right and left. Flashing of lights going by slowly, illuminated chambers seen through open doors, luxuriously garnished with couches and mirrors—going by; crystal pavilions with refection laid out—going by; men calling out names—going by; and then halt. Halt for some five-and-twenty minutes, more or less.

The Night Express has disgorged itself of a sudden; flooding the platform with population. What will my companions do? The bandit has been biting his nails in silence for some minutes back.

"I am thirsty, oh, so thirsty," says he at last.

"Descend, then, my friend, and refresh yourself," suggests Velvet-Hood.

"What precious advice!" he said in his snarling way. "Should I not keep close and retired? Yet she tells me: show yourself abroad."

"It would be wiser, certainly," she said gently.

"But I have a thirst as of Inferno in my throat. I must go. I can wrap this cloak about my face."

"Do so, in Heaven's name." And he stole past me out of the carriage; crawling down the steps like a serpent. I was left with Velvet-Hood.

"Madame has had a weary journey," I said, burning with curiosity to learn something of the mystery.

"It is only the beginning, Monsieur," she said. Then rising, she came over, and placed herself exactly fronting me. She stooped forward to speak, and I saw into the velvet hood. A round, pale face, with saffron hair; with a composed, gentle expression, in keeping with the voice.

"What do you make of all this?" she said, earnestly. "Speak quickly."

What could I make? I would confess to Madame that it embarrassed me not a little. It bore the look of an adventure.

"An adventure, indeed! Would you suppose that I am flying from my husband: from a cruel, persecuting monster?"

I was a Briton, and had Britons' old-fashioned notions about such things. "H'm, indeed!" I was saying, drawing myself up stiffly enough.

"Ah!" continued Velvet-Hood, reading me with a Frenchwoman's quickness, "I know what you think of it. But if you could learn what a wretch he is! Sir, he beats me with his long riding-whip, if I go so much as to look from a window. See!" and, with a strange confidence, she let down the velvet hood, and showed

the back of her neck and shoulders; where there was a long, raw welt, quite red and angry.

"H'm!" I said, "highly improper treatment, no doubt." I was still the dry Briton; but was growing more mystified every instant.

"Sir," she continued, "that was this morning's work. See, again;" and she had stripped her arm in an instant. "That is his bite! Ah! the savage! And he is a marquis of the purest blood in France. Was I to stay—to stay to be lashed and bitten?"

"H'm! certainly not. That is—"

"That is—that is, of course. I know the tune. He was right, of course. Fortunately, there was this noble Neapolitan gentleman to stand between me and this vile oppression—this woman-beating!"

"Pardon me, Madame; but from what I have seen—"

"He is naturally a little timorous. But has a gallant heart for all that. I am under safeguard of his honour, and he will take me to his Neapolitan estates, where his mother and sisters live."

"H'm!" I said; "quite correct."

"Yes," she went on. "There we will stay until this wife-beating monster dies. Dieu merci! he is near to seventy."

"That is the arrangement?" I said.

"That is the arrangement. Carlo is fearful of pursuit; but there is no danger. There is my brother too, another savage—a bully—"

"Most curious history," I said.

Here the Neapolitan appeared at the door, glour-

ing at us both. Velvet-Hood was back in her place in an instant.

Said he, in his snarling way, his black eyes shooting out sparkles, "What is this hole-and-corner work? These confidences when I am gone?—speak."

"Sir," I said, "what do you mean?" I did not over-relish that tone of his.

The old cringing way was on him again in an instant.

"Sir, there is no offence to you whatever. I had forgotten myself but for an instant. Accept my humblest excuses." Then, under his teeth, "Ah, scélérat! I could whip you worse than ever did that husband of yours."

I turned from him with contempt. Wonderful mystery! How she could tolerate this other mean-souled spaniel of a Neapolitan! But there she sat, quite composed and smiling even, with the velvet hood thrown back.

"Don't fret yourself, Carlo, dearest. It is a weary journey, doubtless, but we shall soon be through it."

"Through it!" he said, roughly, pushing away the hand that was laid upon his arm,—he was an unredeemed savage—"how shall you tell me that? What do you know of it? Ah! I have no patience with your idle talk! My soul is sick with suspense."

"Courage," said Velvet-Hood. "Hark! there is the bell! One more halting-place, and we are safe."

As she spoke we began to move slowly, and the express shot forth again into the darkness. The great sea-shells were held to our ears again, and we once

more settled ourselves back in our places, against a long spell of journeying. I had taken in a fresh store of that sea-green aliment, just as engine had been taking in store of coke and water; but, though there was a second Edouard and Marie, whose history seemed deeply interesting—still, with eyes tolerably bleared and drowsy brain, it was not possible to do much in that way. Those who sat opposite seemed to have been wearied out of their troubles. The Velvet-Hood sleeping tranquilly; but the Neapolitan still kept watch—shooting his eyes from right to left, ceaselessly. So the Marseilles express went forward through the night and gray morning, too. Until, grown drowsy myself, the sea-green romance slipped away down to the bottom of the carriage.

No more consciousness until a loud, despairing engine-shriek, prolonged infinitely, roused me up. The Neapolitan had his hands clasped and was calling out piteously: "O mercy! mercy! signors! O gentle signors, listen to me! Spare, spare—ah, 'tis cold, Where are we now? Wake, wake!"

He jostled his companion as he spoke. She roused up in a moment, and turned to him with that strange sweetness of hers.

"Are you refreshed, Carlo?" she said, putting back the velvet hood and smoothing her hair.

"Tell me what hour it is," he said.

She consulted a little jewelled watch hanging at her waist. "Half-past four," she said, with a smile. "How the hours have run on!"

So they had. There was a cold, bluish atmosphere

abroad, and the three night-travellers were shivering miserably with the cold of that early morning. Some stray men in blouses were going to their work; but they had not been up all night.

The train was slackening its speed: it was drawing near that other halting-place. More platform, more range of offices, gliding by in the cold, bluish light. There are some early morning travellers closely muffled up, but very fresh and buoyant, standing ready, and waiting for the express. Very different from the bleared, haggard souls who were pouring out upon the platform.

But a short span for stoppage here: barely five minutes. No stir from my two companions.

"Mordieu! why do they not go forward? I tremble with the cold. Feel me. Oh, I am very miserable, heart and body!"

"Wrap this about you," Velvet-Hood said, taking her shawl from her shoulders and putting it round him. "There!"

He looked at her surlily.

"How quiet you take all this!" he said. "Have you any nerves, or feeling?"

She laughed pleasantly.

"Should you ask that, after—"

"Don't—don't!" he said, covering up his face. "Oh, I could cry now—cry my eyes and heart out! Why don't they go forward?"

At this moment the door was softly opened, and one of the brisk, muffled travellers stepped in. He had a little handy valise, which he put on the seat beside

him, and a snug comforter about his neck. "Fine fresh morning it was," he said, as he loosed his comforter: "good for the country."

"What is this delay?" the Neapolitan said, gruffly. "Why do we not go forward?"

"They were getting up the passports," the brisk man believed. "No, it could not be that either. Ah! here they are."

The door opens again. Three gentlemen in black standing near the steps; one ascends them with a paper in his hand.

"All here have come down from Paris?" he says interrogatively.

"Yes," I answer, being next the door, "excepting this gentleman."

"Pardon, Messieurs," the lady remarks, quite composed. "We only got in at the last halting-place, some twenty leagues or so back."

"Never mind," says the gentleman with the paper; "the lady and gentleman yonder must descend. There is a mistake about their baggage. They must please to hasten themselves."

All this while the Neapolitan has been turning white and red, his teeth chattering galvanically. "Don't trouble yourselves," he says faintly, "it is no matter about the baggage; we can leave it; we do not care."

"By no means," Velvet-Hood says sweetly; "we could not afford that, Messieurs. What is to become of my poor toilette, which is sufficiently disarranged already? Rather let us descend."

"No! no!" the Neapolitan cried, clinging to the arms of the seat with both hands. "Leave us!"

"Sacré!" exclaims one of the gentlemen near the steps, "are they coming down?"

"Now, mon ami," Velvet-Hood said, rising and passing him, "be reasonable. Let us go, if they require us so particularly. Adieu, Monsieur," she said sweetly, turning to me. Then she drew the velvet hood close over her face. The Neapolitan had to be well-nigh dragged from the carriage.

A dim suspicion took possession of me.

"What can it all mean?" I said aloud.

"An affair of police simply," the fresh man remarked. He had, curiously enough, taken up his handy valise, and was preparing to go too. "A veteran gentleman was murdered last night in Paris by his wife (a grisette he had married off the pavé) and his courier. Suspicion—telegraph—nothing more. It is very simple. This lady and gentleman who have just left us are singularly like the description. Good morning, sir—good voyage, sir!"

With that he bowed himself down the steps; a shrill shriek from the engine, impatient to go forward. Well it might, now that what it waited for was accomplished.

The Neapolitan and Velvet-Hood, waiting wearily in the private room of the station, must have heard with heavy heart the shrill departing shriek dying off in the distance.

Said the monastic traveller, now leaning forward in

his stall, like a draped canon, and with that timorous eagerness which is peculiar to shy men, "You speak of the four sides of a railway carriage, and the possibility of being happy or miserable within that narrow area."

He said this awkwardly, as bashful men often do say things awkwardly, and looked straight at the business man, as if challenging his statement. Whereas he was merely laying down the premisses for a further statement of his own.

"Well," said the business man, bluntly, "I *did* say so. And what's more, I bore out my words, as well as I could, by facts."

"What I meant," said the monastic traveller, mildly, "was, that the same observation applies with perfect truth to the case of a cabin on ship-board, and the dramatic action confined in it. I once spent the most miserable Christmas-day—and night, too—in the cabin of a Dutch schooner."

"I am glad to hear it, sir," burst in Cheerful Horn, loudly—"very glad—Ha! HA! HA! That is a good slip! No, no; you musn't take me as rejoicing in your sufferings; but the fact is I have a suspicion—that your observation, sir—was only a prelude or overture to a most diverting narrative of your sorrows on that particular night. Am I right, sir? I know I am! Come!"

"Well," said the monastic traveller, modestly, "I have something to tell in reference, as I said, to the Dutch schooner, and the night I spent in her. Not strictly a story; but, such as it is, very much at the company's service."

"Well said," cried Cheerful Horn, encouragingly; "you'll do it well enough, never fear."

JAN FAGEL'S NIGHT.

A DUTCH LEGEND.

SHE lay off Naarden—the good ship Brocken Spectre, —far out in the roads; and I often thought, as I looked at her through the haze, what an ancient, ill-favoured hulk it was. I suppose I came down some three or four times that day, being in a lounging unsatisfied state of mind; and took delight in watching the high, old-fashioned poop, as it rocked all day long in that one spot. I likened it to a French roof of the olden time, it was garnished with so many little windows: and over all was the great lantern, which might have served conveniently for the vane or cupola seen upon such structures. For all that, it was not unpicturesque, and would have filled a corner in a Vandervelde picture harmoniously enough. She was to sail at three o'clock next morning, and I was to be the solitary cabin passenger.

As evening came on, it grew prematurely dark and cloudy; while the waves acquired that dull indigo tint so significant of ugly weather. Raw gusts came sweeping in towards the shore, searching me through and through. I must own to a sinking of the heart as I took note of these symptoms, for a leaning towards ocean in any of its moods had never been one of my failings; and it augured but poorly for the state of the elements next morning. "It will have spent itself

during the night," I muttered, doubtfully; and turned back to the inn to eat dinner with what comfort I might.

That place of entertainment stood by itself upon a bleak sandy hill. From its window I could see, afar off, three lights rising and falling together, just where the high poop and lantern had been performing, the same ocean-dance in the daytime. I was sitting by the fire, listening ruefully to the wind, when news was brought to me that the Captain, Van Steen, had come ashore, and was waiting below to see me.

I found him walking up and down outside—a short, thick-set man—as it were, built upon the lines of his own vessel.

"Well, captain, you wished to see me," I said.

"Look to this, my master," he said, bluntly. "There's a gale brewing yonder, and wild weather coming. So just see to this. If we're not round the Helder Head by to-morrow night, we may have to beat round the Bay for days and days. So look to it, master, and come aboard while there is time."

"I'm ready at any moment," I said; "but how do you expect to get round now? The sea is high enough as it is."

"No matter; the wind may be with us in the morning. We must clear the Head before to-morrow night. Why, look you," he added, sinking his voice mysteriously, "I wouldn't be off Helder to-morrow night—no, not for a sack of guilders!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you know? It's Christmas night—Jan Fagel's night—Captain Jan's!"

"Well?"

"He comes to Helder to-morrow night; he is seen in the Bay. But we are losing time, master," said he, seizing my arm; "get your things ready—these lads will carry them to the boat."

Three figures here advanced out of the shadow, and entered with me. I hastily paid the bill, and set forward with the captain for the shore, where the boat was waiting. My mails were got on board with all expedition, and we were soon far out upon the waters, making steadily for the three lights. It was not blowing very hard as yet; neither had the waves assumed the shape of what are known as white horses; but there was a heavy underground swell, and a peculiar swooping motion quite as disagreeable. Suddenly, I made out the great lantern just overhead, shining dimly, as it were through a fog. We had glided under the shadow of a dark mass, wherein there were many more dim lights at long intervals—and all together seemed performing a wild dance to the music of dismal creaking of timbers and rattling of chains. As we came under, a voice hailed us out of the darkness—as it seemed from the region of the lantern; and presently invisible hands cast us ropes, whereby, with infinite pains and labour, I was got on deck. I was then guided down steep ways into the cabin, the best place for me under the circumstances. As soon as the wind changed, the captain said, we would put out to sea.

By the light of a dull oil-lamp overhead, that never for a moment ceased swinging, I tried to make

out what my new abode was like. It was of an ancient massive fashion, with a dark oak paneling all round, rubbed smooth in many places by wear of time and friction. All round were queer little nobs and projections, mounted in brass and silver, just like the butt-ends of pistols; while here and there were snug recesses that reminded me of canons' stalls in a cathedral. The swinging lamp gave but a faint yellow light, that scarcely reached beyond the centre of the room; so that the oak-work all round cast little grotesque shadows, which had a very gloomy and depressing effect. There was a sort of oaken shelf at one end—handsomely wrought, no doubt, but a failure as to sleeping capabilities. Into this I introduced myself without delay, and soon fell off into a profound slumber, for I was weary enough.

When I awoke again, I found there was a figure standing over me, who said he was Mr. Bode, the mate, who wished to know could he serve me in any way? Had we started yet? I asked. Yes, we had started—above an hour now—but she was not making much way. Would I get up—this was Christmas-day. So it was; I had forgotten that. What a place to hold that inspiring festival in! Mr. Bode, who was inclined to be communicative, then added that it was blowing great guns: whereof I had abundant confirmation from my own physical sufferings, then just commencing. No, I would not—could not get up; and so, for the rest of that day, dragged on a miserable existence, many times wishing that the waters would rise and cover me. Late in the evening I fell into a

kind of uneasy doze, which was balm of Gilead to the tempest-tost landsman.

When I awoke again, it was night once more; at least, there was the dull oil-lamp, swinging lazily as before. There was the same painful music—the same eternal creaking and straining, as of ship's timbers in agony. What o'clock was it? Where were we now? Better make an effort and go up, and see how we were getting on—it was so lonely down here. Come in!

Here the door was opened, and Mr. Bode the mate presented himself. It was a bad night, Mr. Bode said—a very bad night. He had come to tell me we were off the Head at last. He thought I might care to know.

“I am glad to hear it,” I said faintly; “it will be something smoother in the open sea.”

He shook his head. “No open sea for us to-night; no, nor to-morrow night most likely.”

“What is all this mystery?” said I, now recollecting the captain's strange allusions at the inn-door. “What do you mean?”

“It is Jan Fagel's night,” said he solemnly. “He comes into the bay to-night. An hour more of the wind, and we should have been clear. But we did what we could—a man can do no more than his best.”

“But who is Jan Fagel?”

“You never heard?”

“Never. Tell me about him.”

“Well,” said he, “I shan't be wanted on deck for some time yet, so I may as well be here.” And Mr. Bode settled himself in one of the canons' stalls, thus

retiring into the shadow, and began the history of Jan Fagel and his vessel.

“You have never heard of the famous brig Maelström, once on a time well known in these roads? No, for you have not been much about here, I dare say; and it is only old sea-folk like myself that would care to talk to you of such things. But I can tell you this—there’s not a sailor along the coast that hasn’t the story, though it’s now—let me see—a good hundred years since she made her last cruise. Why, I recollect, when I was a boy, the old hull lying on the sands, and breaking up with every tide—for she came to that end after all—the famous Maelström, Captain Jan Fagel, commander. I have been told there never was such a boat for foul weather, but that was when he was on board of her. He was a terrible man, was Captain Fagel, and would turn wild when a gale got up; and as the wind blew harder, so he grew wilder, until at last it seemed as if he had gone mad altogether. Why, there was one night my father used to tell of, when there was a great thunderstorm, and the sea was washing over the lighthouses—the most awful night he ever was out in—it was said that when the flashes came, Captain Jan had been seen dancing and skipping upon his deck. Many of his sailors told afterwards how they heard his mad shrieks above the roaring of the wind! Some said he had sold himself to the Evil One, which I think myself more than likely, for he cared neither for God nor man.

“Well, sir, Captain Fagel took first to the smuggling trade; and soon he and his famous brig became

known all along the coast, from Hoek up to Helder—ay, and beyond that. But he was seen oftenest at the Head—as if he had a sort of liking for the place—and always came and went in a storm. So that, when the Zuyder was like a boiling cauldron, and the water running over the lighthouse galleries, old sailors would look up in the wind's eye, and say, 'Captain Fagel's running a cargo to-night.' At last it came to this, that whenever he was seen off Helder, he was thought to bring a storm with him. And then they would shake their heads, and say Captain Fagel was abroad that night. Soon he grew tired of this work—it was too quiet for him—so he turned Rover, and ran up the black flag. He still kept up his old fashion of bearing down in a gale; and many a poor disabled craft that was struggling hard to keep herself afloat, would see the black hull of the Maelström coming down upon her in the storm, and so would perish miserably upon the rocks. He was no true sailor, sir, that captain, but a low pirate; and he came to a pirate's end. And this was the way he fell upon his last cruise, just off Helder Head yonder.

"There was a certain councillor of the town who had many times crossed him in his schemes, and had once been near taking him. Fagel hated him like poison, and swore he would have his revenge of him, one day. But the councillor did not fear him—not a bit of him, but even offered a reward to whoever would take or destroy Captain Fagel and his vessel. When the captain came to hear of this, he fell to raving and foaming at the mouth, and then swore a great oath

upon his own soul that he would be revenged of the councillor. And this was the way he went about it :

“The councillor had a fair young wife, Madame Elde, whom he had brought out of France some years before, and whom he loved exceedingly—foolishly, some said, for a man of his years. They and their little girl lived together at a place called Loo, and no family could be happier. Jan Fagel knew the place well, and laid his devilish plans accordingly. So, as usual, on one of his wild, stormy nights, the brig was seen standing in to shore—for no good purpose, as every body guessed. How he and his mad crew got to land was never accounted for ; but this is certain—they broke into the house at Loo, and dragged Madame Elde and her child from their beds, and forced them down to their boats. The councillor was away in the city ; but Captain Jan knew well enough how he loved his wife, and chose this way of torturing him. An old fisherman, who lived hard by the shore, said, that he woke up suddenly in the night, and heard their screams ; but they were too many for him, or he would have gone out. He was an old man, and it was only natural. They then pulled away for the ship, he standing up, and screaming at the waves like a fiend incarnate, as he was. How the poor passengers ever got alive on board was a miracle—for the waves came dashing over the bows of the boat, where they were lying, at every stroke.

“Now it fell out, that at this time there was a British frigate cruising about these parts—for Captain Fagel had, a short time before this, fired into an English

vessel. The frigate was, therefore, keeping a sharp look-out for the brig, and had been looking into all the creeks and harbours along the coasts, when she was caught in this very storm—of Captain Fagel's raising. Just as she was struggling round the Head, she came upon the Maelström, taking on board her boat's crew.

“‘Let go, all clear!’ they heard him cry, even above the storm—and then they saw the dark hull swing round, and set off along shore, where it was hard for the frigate to follow. As for Jan Fagel, if ever Satan entered into a man in this life, he must have possessed him that night! They could hear him from the other vessel, as he shrieked with delight, and swore, and bounded along his deck, when other men could scarcely keep their feet. Why, sir, one time, he was seen on the edge of the taffrail—his eyes looking in the dark like two burning coals! No doubt he would have got away from them, after all—for there was no better mariner in those seas—when just as he was coming round a point, they heard a crash, and down came his topmast upon his deck. The sailors rushed to clear away the wreck.

“‘Bring up the woman,’ he roared through his trumpet. ‘Bring up the woman and child, you sea imps!’ Though his ship was in danger, he thought of the councillor. Some of them rushed down into the hold, and came up in a moment with Madame Elde and the little girl. She was quite scared, and sank down upon the deck, as if she were insensible.

“‘A handsome creature, sir,’ they said; even some

of those savages felt for her. They heard her saying, over and over again, to herself:

“ ‘Oh, such a Christmas night! Such a Christmas night!’

“He overheard her.

“ ‘Ah, ah! witch! you shall have a merry Christmas, never fear. So should your husband—curse him—if we had him here.’

“She started up with a scream when she heard him speaking. And then they saw her standing, with her long black hair blown back by the wind, and her arms out, as if she were praying. ‘Where shall Thy judgments find this man?’

“ ‘Here, witch! Look for me here on a stormy night—any night; next Christmas, if you like. Hi, lads! get a sail here, and send them over the side.’

“Even those ruffians hung back, for it was too awful a night for them to add murder to their other sins. So, with many oaths, Captain Fagel went forward himself to seize the lady.

“ ‘He shall meet me before the Judgment-seat,’ said she, still praying.

“ ‘Cant away, sorceress! come back here of a stormy night, and I’ll meet you: I’m not afraid;’ and he laughed long and loud.

“Then he flung the wet sail round them, and with his own hands cast them into the sea. The storm came on fiercer than ever, and they thought that the ship’s timbers were going to part. But Jan Fagel strode about his deck, and gave his orders, and she

bore up well before the wind. It seemed that no harm could come to that ship when he was on board of her. As for the frigate, she had long since got away into the open sea. But the lady's words were not to be in vain; for just as he was going one of his mad bounds along the poop, his foot caught in a coil of rope, and he went over with an unearthly scream into the black, swollen sea. All the crew ran to look out after him, but, strange to tell, without so much as thinking of casting him a rope. It seemed as if they had lost their sense for a time, and could only stand there looking into the waves that had swept him off. Just then, the wind went down a little, and they heard a voice high in the mainmast-top, as if some one were calling; and these words came to them very clear and distinct: 'Yo, yo! Jan Fagel, yo!' Then all the crew at the vessel's side, as if they had caught some of his own devilish spirit, could not keep themselves from giving out, in a great wild chorus, 'Yo, yo! Jan Fagel, yo!' Once more the voice came from the mainmast top, calling, 'Yo, yo! Jan Fagel, yo!' and again the crew answered, louder than before, as if they were possessed. He was seen no more after that.

"The memory of that night never left that wicked crew; and many of them, when dying quietly in their beds long after, started up with that cry, as though they were answering a call, and so passed away to their last account.

"Every year, as sure as Christmas night comes round, Jan Fagel comes into the Bay to keep his word with Madame Elde. And any ship that is off the

Head then, must wait and beat about until midnight; when he goes away.

"But they want me on deck," said Mr. Bode, looking at his watch. "I have stayed too long as it is."

Mr. Bode hastily departed, leaving me to ponder over his wild legend. Ruminating upon it, and listening to the rushing of the water, close to my ear, I fell off again in a sleep, and began to dream; and, of course, dreamed of Captain Jan Fagel.

It was a wild and troubled sleep, that I had; and I am sure, if any one had been standing near, they would have seen me starting and turning uneasily, as if in grievous trouble. First, I thought I was ashore again, in a sheltered haven, safely delivered from all this wretched tossing. And I recollect how inexpressibly delightful the feeling of repose was, after all these weary labours. By and by, I remarked low-roofed old-fashioned houses all about, seemingly of wood, with little galleries running round the windows. And I saw stately burghers walking, in dresses centuries old; and ladies with great round frills about their necks, and looking very stiff and majestic, sat and talked to the burghers. They were coming in and out of the queer houses, and some passed quite close to me, saluting me, as they did so, very graciously. One thing seemed very strange to me. They had all a curious dried look about their faces, and a sort of stony cast in their eyes, which I could not make out. Still they came and went, and I looked on and wondered. Suddenly I saw the little Dutch houses and figures all quivering and getting indistinct, and gradually the picture faded away,

until it grew slowly into the shape of the cabin where I was now lying. There it was, all before me, with the canons' stalls and the dull swinging lamp, and I myself leaning on one hand in the carved crib, and thinking what a weary voyage this was! How monotonous the rushing sound of the water! Then my dream went on, and it seemed to me that I took note of a canon's stall in the centre, something larger and better-fashioned than the others—the dean's, most likely, I concluded wisely, when he comes to service. And then on that hint, as it were, I seemed to travel away over the waters to ancient aisles, and tracery, and soft ravishing music, and snowy figures seen afar off duskily amid clouds of incense. In time, too, all that faded away, and I was back again in the oak cabin, with the sickly yellow light suffusing every thing, and a dark misty figure sitting right opposite. He caused me no surprise or astonishment, and I received him there as a matter of course, as people do in dreams. I had seen figures like him somewhere. In Rembrandt's pictures, was it? Most likely; for there was the large broad hat, and the stiff white collar and tassels, and the dark jerkin; only there was a rusty, mouldering look about his garments that seemed very strange to me. He had an ancient sword, too, on which he leaned his arm; and so sat there motionless, looking on the ground. He sat that way I don't know how long: I, as it seemed to me, studying him intently: when suddenly the rushing sound ceased, and there came a faint cry across the waters, as from afar off. It was the old cry: "Yo, yo! Jan Fagel, yo!" Then I saw the figure

raise its head suddenly, and the yellow light fell upon his face—such a mournful, despairing face!—with the same stony gaze I had seen in the others. Again the fearful cry came—nearer, as it seemed; and I saw the figure rise up slowly and walk across the cabin to the door. As he passed me he turned his dead, lacklustre eyes full upon me, and looked at me for an instant. Never shall I forget that moment. It was as if a horrid weight was pressing on me. I felt such agony that I awoke with a start, and found myself sitting up and trembling all over. But at that instant—whether the dreamy influence had not wholly passed away, or whatever was the reason I don't know—I can swear that, above the rushing sound of the waves and the whistling of the wind, I heard that ghostly chorus, “Yo, yo! Jan Fagel, yo!” quite clear and distinct.

“This,” said the narrator, hastily anticipating criticism on his little history, “is only a bit of still life, a picture with one figure—a dream if you will.”

“But the Inns!” said Cheerful Horn, running one eye knowingly along a spectral fowling-piece. “We must give you up the stage business and the highwaymen. But your Inns; your famous Old Coach and Horses, Hen and Chickens, Bull and Mouth, White Horse Cellars, where are they? And the old port! I *do* believe,” added Cheerful Horn, with much despondency, “that there is no old port in the world now—no old port whatever!”

“I believe in the Inns still,” said the shooting man (fresh inspiring voice, flying straight from a light

heart, and which I knew would sound musically under Harrowdale Rafters); "at least in France, where they are said to order things better. On the great diligence roads, that is, eh, Jack? The Silver Horn to wit."

"You may say so," said his friend; "or that little one-act piece you saw at the sign of the Golden Monkey. A good house, too, for that sort of stirring entertainment."

"Ha, ha!" said Cheerful Horn, winding a perfect hunting fanfare on his instrument. "You have a legend or a story, with, perhaps, a little ghostly reasoning attached to those two houses? Right am I? So I thought."

"Tell your yarn about the Golden Monkey, Jack," said the first shooting man.

"Well, with all my heart!" said the second shooting man. "But I was always a poor hand at a yarn. Here is mine; such as it is."

LITTLE CONSTANCY'S BIRTHDAY.

I LOOK back to a time, some years ago, when there came great storms and tempests—the most terrible that old people then alive recollected. I think how, for weeks together, it blew great guns in the Channel—how with every mail came news of bursting dams, of rivers swelling up suddenly, of great trees uprooted, of houses blown down, and their timbers found many fields away; of poor souls overtaken by the waters, and never heard of more: in short, of one cruel chapter of misfortune. Captains from foreign

countries, making English ports with infinite risk and hardship, brought tidings that off the Dutch coast the people were up night and day watching their dykes, and that the great French rivers had come down roaring from their mountains, sweeping the whole country quite clear. Many ships, homeward bound, and within sight of land, went down miserably with all hands, as the wreck-chart of that year can testify, the coast being littered for many weeks with planks, shattered casks, and staved seamen's chests. I think over these things, and of the misery and wailing they brought with them, and they grow into a rough inclement background for this one passage in my life.

It fell out unhappily that at this particular season, of all seasons in the year, I had to cross the seas; and of all seas in the world, the great Bay of Biscay. A failing house in Spain, long mismangement, with other reasons at this date of little moment, made it of absolute necessity that I should set forth with all speed upon this errand. Curiously enough, though there were then signs and tokens of coming storms, I did not so much mind going to sea for a long voyage. But there was another reason which would have made me buy off that journey at any cost, had that been possible. I had just been married—barely three weeks before—to my own cousin, Constance; as sweet a little dame as ever stood lightly upon this earth. A brown-haired, bright-eyed, blooming, and most bewitching little dame. Little Constancy she was to me, by which hangs a pretty history, of stern and cruel relations, of secret engagement, of journeying to the Indies and long ab-

sence, of letters miscarrying, of her being wearily importuned to give up this exile who had now given her up, and choose from a band of willing worshipers, all ardently beseeching her. Which pretty history finishes off with her holding out to the very last, like a brave Little Constancy as she was; and with the good ship *Dear Delight*, having some one long-expected on board, being signalled off the Downs; with joining of hands and happy wind-up, and with many more things besides, usually of small interest to any, beyond the parties themselves. This, however, was why she was called my Little Constancy, and made it seem hard that we should be so soon put asunder again.

It was of no use repining; for to stay, as I have said, was only the next door to ruin. So I made ready for the voyage with sham spirits for poor Little Constancy's sake, finding proper comfort in the well-worn saw introduced on such occasions. And upon the fourteenth day of December, at two in the morning, I went on board of that magnificent fast-sailing line-of-packet ship, *Albatross*, fifteen hundred tons burden, standing A 1 at Lloyd's, and then lying off Gravesend.

As to the voyage out, and its incidents, I will say nothing beyond this; that if the sailing of that magnificent first-class line-of-packet ship had been purposely delayed with the view of meeting those great gales before mentioned, it could not have been more nicely contrived; for, within twenty hours after losing sight of land, the waves began to swell, and the wind to blow from the south. For seven days and seven nights we lay in a trough, as it were, enduring a weary round of

staving-in of bulwarks, and washing of men overboard; of lashing to the masts, and of other miserable shipwreck incidents. I did not dream, when taken in early youth to hear a famous nautical performer chant, "How we lay, on that day, in the Bay of Biscay, O!" that I should myself come one day to realise the horrors of that mariner's situation. On the morning of the eighth day we got sight of the Spanish coast, and within six hours the magnificent fast-sailing line-of-packet ship was towed in, an inglorious show, with two masts cut away, and all hands at the pumps to keep her from foundering.

As soon as I had gathered a little strength after the hardships of the voyage, I turned to righting the affairs of our house, which were even in worse condition than they had been described. There was a curious feebleness over me, which I could not at all account for; but I put my shoulder to the work, and soon got things into shape; and then began to think of setting out on my journey home; but not by way of the ocean, as may be well conceived. Of such rough travelling I had had more than sufficient, and even then no vessel durst put out to sea; accordingly, I made up my mind to take the road across the mountains, down through the French country, and in this manner get back to home and Little Constancy. Therefore, though I felt at times a sort of feverish ague closing its fingers on me, together with a heavy sickness about my heart, I was ready by the third evening to set out. I travelled all through that night, and the best portion of the next day, thinking how five days more would find me at

home, with ample time to spare, before the coming of Little Constancy's birthday, the last day in the year. Struggling hard to put away from me those closing, creeping fingers; when towards nightfall, my head began to swim round, and the fingers to take fast hold, and I felt that I must give in at last. Now, at a lonely posting village, called Laon, or Lacon, or some such name, just past the French frontier, the bitter truth was at last forced upon me, that I could go no farther; so I was helped up into the lonely inn of the lonely place, through a little crowd of rude, heavy peasants, up into a cold dismal cell, with a brick floor. Through a dewy film, fast gathering on my eyes, was visible the landlord's full-moon face, gloating, ogre-like, over the prey dropped at his door. The ogre would feast upon me yet, and, worse than all, keep me there in duress for ages. More wretched than ever I had felt before in my life, I gave myself up unresisting to the gripe of the ague fingers, and was soon wandering, lost in the hot clouds of fever-land. That first night in the lonely inn was a night of terrors and horrid shapes, familiars of intermittent fever just then beginning its work. I was drowning—beaten under—swallowed up in great green waves, over and over again. There was the old roar of waters in my ears, and I would wake up gasping, only to find myself tossing in those other fiery, linen waves. At the dead of the night, even as the poor soldier in the song, "A sweet vision I saw, And thrice ere the morning I dreamt it again." Not thrice only, but many times, were those boiling waters parted, and a bright green spot, where the sun was

shining, and Little Constancy walking—looking out anxiously for one, under pledge to return home by her birthday, displayed to my poor eyes. Struggling, panting to reach that spot, which looked like Paradise, I would be drawn back again, and would waken up with a cry of despair.

When daylight broke, it showed me a crowd of stupid, staring faces,—the great saucer-eyed landlord, an ogre by daylight; his wife, saucer-eyed too; and a creature white-aproned, with a basin and towel, whose office I divined instinctively. I motioned him away distractedly, adjuring him with wild gestures to be gone. I would not be quacked to death, I shrieked, by their barber-surgeons. The round, stupid faces looked on one another, the negro lips muttered some jargon, and I heard the sabots clatter as they closed in round me. The wretch with the bowl had something glittering between his teeth, plainly bent upon his bloody work. He was advancing on me, and all hope seemed gone, when the sabots shuffled and scraped once more, and the heavy, lumbering figures opened a passage for some one to approach. A figure in black, an angel from Heaven, it seemed to me, glided up softly to the bedside, took my hot hand in his, and spoke words in a low voice that filled me with comfort. Most sweet and soothing apparition was it, the gentle ecclesiastic of the village, who had heard of the stranger that lay sick up at the inn. I pointed feebly to the man with the bowl and instrument, who I felt was still thirsting for blood. I was understood; and a few words sent the staring crowd clattering and shuf-

fling from the room, down the sanded stairs, into the street.

A dark-robed being remained, whom I watched curiously for hours after, moving softly round the room, and bending over something on the fire. It at once took possession of me that this must be a leech; one of the mysterious men read of in old books, who dealt in specifics, and electuaries, and healing draughts. Perhaps he had about him an elixir of strange potency; and when the dark-robed figure, bending down low over the fire, took something off and drew near to the bed with a glass goblet filled with a potion, I looked anxiously to see him take from his breast that red purse containing an amulet, which was to be steeped many minutes in the efficacious draught. Thence came deep sleep, and sudden awakening, late at night, together with a sense of refreshment, and weary load removed.

Within four days from that date I was getting up, well-nigh restored; being brought through by the kind thought and skill of my village curé. He had a good knowledge of simples, that gentle priest, which served him quite as well as the hakim's purse and amulet; and, better still, had kept the door fast against the accredited practitioner, who had come, importunately, many times over. I was so restored, indeed, that we came to talking of my setting out within a day or so. Very pleasant was it to think of those great fever-waves, now wholly subsided; and of the smooth tableland where Little Constancy had been seen to walk; and of that dear birthday to which I had been looking, — now at last attainable, and within certain hope.

Pleasant, too, even that laying out the route speculatively, with the good curé's help. How I was to post it expeditiously to Toulouse; how I was to lie there one night, and then take the heavy diligence straight up to Paris; which, it was certain, had once more commenced its runnings, the roads having been hastily got into repair. From Toulouse to Paris, then, in a heavy diligence; on from Paris in a heavy diligence again; Calais then; Dover then—Ship hotel; the Lightning, four-horse coach; London; Little Constancy and birthday fireside. Thus we laid it out; when, suddenly, for the first time, I bethought me of a certain leather pocket-book, securely fastened up in one of those courier-bags travellers carry. It was gone. It was not in the outside pocket under the flap, nor in the inside pocket; nor in greatcoat, nor in any place of security that I possessed. I was aghast. On that leathern case hung all the elements of the vista I had contemplated,—heavy diligence, Ship hotel, fast Lightning coach, and Little Constancy herself. With trembling fingers I rushed to my keys, and delved down distractedly in the undermost layers of my valise, turning all out in a great heap upon the floor. It was of no avail; the leathern pocket-book was gone utterly: stolen, most likely, by those stupid, staring boors, that crowded round when I was helped in, faint and nearly unconscious. To this opinion the good curé would by no means incline; holding that, though stupid, heavy natures, the men of those parts were true and honest; full of a pastoral simplicity; that you might leave a purse upon the highway, and not have it taken up;

that, in short, it was far more likely I had dropped it on the mountains. The cruel mischance, to whatever cause owing, had dashed down all my hopes and pleasant dreaming, levelling them pitilessly, like so many card-houses. I was to be bound to this wretched place for another week at least, having to wait advices from Paris, with a fresh supply of money.

I suppose that, at a rough estimate, that posting-village might include some ten or twelve cottages, disposed impartially, so as to form a street. The inn, which was at the sign of the Golden Monkey, was the post-house—or perhaps the post-house was the inn. For the post element had entered into being long before the entertaining business. Beyond the little street, the village dispersed itself, and broke up into scattered farm-houses, speckling over the valley at long intervals. But every thing had a bleared and stripped aspect; for, at the back, rose the mountains of a blue shivering tint, down which swept eternally cutting blasts, the line of whose action lay through our street longitudinally, so that all objects in its walk were being stripped and blighted ceaselessly. From these causes the Golden Monkey himself—once rampant over the door—had long since become a mere tabula rasa, or plain void, every inch of his gold and brilliance being scraped from him by the rough mountain powers. So, too, had been dealt with the walls whereon the Golden Monkey had leant him, exhibiting patches and bare places, like the back of an outlawed dog. So, too, the farm-house roofs had been dealt with, which were always having new tiles set in to replace old ones borne through the air

to adjoining parishes. So, too, the boors' faces had been dealt with—men, women, and children boors being peeled and charred by this same mountain-blast. It made me collapse when I would first go forth into the street, piercing me through like a sharp sword. Such of the trees as had escaped blowing to the ground long since, had the same blasted look. Altogether, considering that it had pretty much this aspect all through, summer and winter—the blue mountains keeping off the sun in summer, and proving good nurseries for sharp gusts and drenching rains in winter—it was about as comfortless a spot as a miserable soul could desire for itself. There was not in the wide world a valley so bleak. I chafed sorely during the days I waited for the letters; keeping upon one eternal beat, between the Golden Monkey and another building, the post for letters, Gendarmerie and Douane, all in one. For the high offices of police-director, chief of the customs, and postmaster-general of the district, are here all heaped upon the shoulders of one little old man—Barbou, by name—Monsieur le Chef, Monsieur le Directeur de la Chambre de Commerce, and the rest of it. Barbou was a little old man, with twinkling carbuncle eyes, nut-cracker nose and chin; always to be seen in a little black skull-cap and ancient flowered dressing-gown; which, as Barbou loved to set forth wearily, had been in Egypt, Spain, Russia, and other countries, in service of the Grand Army, and of the Grand Man. He had served—my faith, yes!—had served, and seen some bloody fields, had Barbou; witness that of Friedland, where his shako had been bored through with a

musket-ball. Grand cross, Legion of Honour, from the hand of the Grand Man himself! Did I note any thing remarkable about his face? A likeness, say, to any personage, eh? Well, he was often held to resemble, marvellously, one of the Grand Man's family. Once—and here Monsieur Barbou's voice would fall into a sort of huskiness,—once had the Grand Man, when coming down the ranks, in the redingote and cocked-hat, stopped full before him, frowning hard, and taking many pinches of snuff. The Grand Homme did not wish any one to be like him. People now alive had often spoken of him in connexion with his Majesty the King of Westphalia. Eh? Well, well! those days were all gone by for him.

This history was usually being rehearsed when the form of looking through some half-dozen or so old yellow letters—that have lain there dozens of years—was being proceeded with. I came upon the beat once, twice, and three times in the day: indeed, as often as I hear the sound of car or cart-wheel; each time feeling certain that there could be no letters; that if there were, it would be in suspension of all physical laws; and yet I went upon that beat perseveringly and insanely, finding in it a sort of relief and alleviation. There came the same little drama every time—the black skull-cap and flowery dressing-gown, as before; the episode from the great wars, as before; likeness and cast of features, as before; Grand Homme, as before. Then the old inquiry and old visiting of a decayed pigeon-hole, and bringing out of the faded yellow bundle; careful deciphering of the inscriptions seriatim,

with gathering of them up again, and regrets that Monsieur's packet had not arrived. Would come by next mail, he was sure. Which tedious little act was played out with such shrugging, and bows, and smiles, that I could not but take my part in it patiently, and minister to the old Brave's weakness. For who was there in that place beyond myself to come to the Bureau and ask for expected letters?

Six, seven, and eight days, and no Paris despatch. I began to grow desperate. I was eating my heart up, and dashing myself against the bars of an iron cage, pining for deliverance. I began to loathe every man, woman, and child, and twig, about the place. It was now grown quite a blank solitude; for even my good curé had left, and was gone one of his rounds. Of nights, strange and horrible roarings could be heard up the mountains, results of sharp blasts sweeping across hollows, which might have been taken for goblins playing at ghostly nine-pins. I might as well have been upon a desert island, like Crusoe and other shipwrecked men, and was gloomily figuring to myself how I, too, might set up a post, with the date of my coming marked; and set to at once notching it with a penknife for the days. There were signs, also, that, up the blue mountains, more terrible storms were gathering, and indistinct rumour had reached the village of a river having swelled up suddenly many miles away, and of consequent wreck and desolation.

One Sunday evening, when I was leaning on my hands looking out at the cold blueness over the mountains, and thinking it was like enough that I should go

melancholy mad, there suddenly appeared at the door a little man, in a blue frock and brass-bound sabots, and a red comforter about his neck. He stood staring in the door-way, rolling his eye stupidly, much as all his brethren had the habit of doing, but without attempting to speak.

"Well!" said I, turning away gloomily from the cold blue, "well, friend, what is it?"

He was Jacquot, he said.

Well, what could be done for Jacquot?

Nothing. Only he had come down from Barbou's, who had called him in as he was passing, and given him a sou, and bade him run quickly, tell the Monsieur who was staying at the Golden Monkey—"tell him," said the little man, beginning to count on his fingers, "firstly, that a packet had just arrived, and that—"

I started up—it had come at last—"Where! when!" I said, "quick—give it me!"

"And," said Jacquot, still at his fingers, "secondly, I was to tell Monsieur—" I must at this moment have sprung at Jacquot; for that little man took from his breast a small parcel, and disappeared instantly.

I opened it with trembling fingers, by the light of the fire, and out of the cover there dropped two letters: one with the Paris postmark—plainly from the banker there with supplies; the other English, but not from Little Constancy. Most curious this; for write, write, had been our last words, solemnly covenanted and sworn. Not from Little Constancy, but from my English man of business, and dated two days before:

"Dear sir," said the letter,— "Not having received

advice of my last communication, I feel I should be wanting in duty if I did not urge your immediate return. I will not conceal from you that the physician pronounces Mrs. Sherburne's case to be almost hopeless. At twelve o'clock this day there was a slight change for the better; but such fluctuations, as I am advised, are but imperfect indices of restoration. Your presence would be of much profit, as much I fear of Mrs. Sherburne's illness must be set down to an untrue rumour of the ship's being lost. Direct to Paris. Care of Messrs. Fauchon & Cie. Trusting that by this time you will be so far on your road home,—Remain, dear sir, yours, &c."

A cruel, crushing, undreamt-of blow for the lonely traveller bending over the fire in the bleak inn,—not too bleak, however,—fittest place for him and in excellent keeping. My heart seemed to have withered up suddenly. I felt a craving to go forth to get lost in that cold blue mist up the mountains, and be never heard of more. For my pearl of great price—my Little Constancy, was gone,—taken from me.

No! not yet, thank Heaven! and my eyes fell upon that other letter lying across the fender. Money could do much: speed could do much: stern will and action could do much to shorten the road. Action, then, with desperate purpose. That seasonable packet would bear me over mountains, and river, and ocean, and hundred obstacles. With which war-cry, as it were, of Action!—Action! ringing in my ears, I was in an instant hurrying down to Barbou's. I told him

my case in a few hasty words. He entered into it at once, like a true soldier of the empire. All his old tricks, his bows and shrugs, his flowered dressing-gown, he put from him in an instant. He, too, had the war-cry—Action!

“No time to lose,” said he; “I am proud to help a bold man and brave husband. Give me two minutes to think, without a word.”

During those two minutes he looked into a little book many times, and wrote certain figures; then, tapping his forehead, said, “*Je le tiens*. I have it. Listen!”

If we can meet the great diligence which passes by Bourdeaux at three o'clock in the morning, all is saved. Forty miles before midnight will do it. One hour for sleep, if you can, and two hours more in the malle-poste; but it must be headlong speed—*ventre à terre* the whole way. Had I made up my mind to that?

“To any thing,” I said; “but that first fifty miles, how shall I cover *them*?”

“Have no fears,” said M. Barbou, “you know Jacquot? Well, Jacquot’s father has a fleet mare that will run till she drops—a noble beast; also a light market-cart. Jacquot’s father will let you have his market-cart, and drive you himself, if I ask it. He will land you at Saint Marsan before midnight, I lay my life on it.”

Within ten minutes from that time the fleet mare and light cart were at the door of the Golden Monkey, and I was shaking M. Barbou by the hand. The

boors were standing about, staring stupidly, as only came natural to them. Then, with hearty *bon voyage*, chorussed by Monsieur Barbou, the landlord, and little Jacquot, and with one last stare of bewilderment from the boors, the fast mare was given her head, and shot away clear of the little street like a flash of fire.

It might have been then close upon six o'clock of the darkest night I had known there; and, as the last light from the village disappeared in the distance, the fleet mare turned sharply aside from the high road and became lost in rough, unpaved, country cross-roads, which Jacquot's father knew by heart. He had no words to throw away. Gradually the fleet mare warmed to the work, and seemed at last to fly rather than run; taking us at one even pace up steep hills and down steep hills; along clay roads and lanes where roads had never been; down gullies, across trenches and rushing brooks; through mist and fog. Only at times, when sweeping round a corner, the fleet mare and light cart would reel unsteadily, soon, however, to right themselves again. By and by, on the other side of a thick wood, I caught sounds of low roarings, as from wild-beasts. "Inundation," said Jacquot's father curtly, turning the fleet mare's head towards the right; of which disaster we presently met further tokens in the shape of a great flood crossing the road, causing the mare to stop short, rearing on her haunches. But Jacquot's father, with wild yells and imprecations, fell to lashing the fleet mare's flanks, bending over and working at the head-reins like one possessed, and so forced her, kicking and splashing,

through the great flood. Once, also, the light cart was tilted up on a big stone, and was toppling over, when Jacquot's father sprang across me, and the next instant was hanging at the mare's head.

At last, towards a quarter past eleven, after five hours or so of this headlong speed, Jacquot's father pointed with his whip to a dim light upon a hill. I began to find my heart lightening wonderfully. British home and Little Constancy did not seem hopeless, after all; for yonder is Saint Marsan, that other posting village which the fleet mare was bound to reach before midnight.

The fleet mare had done her task; and by this time, no doubt, the malle-poste was drawn up at the door, waiting to change horses, and bear me forward. Suddenly a voice called to us out of the darkness, seeking to know if we are going on beyond the village, for that the river had swelled up the night before, burst its banks, doing grievous damage, and carrying away the new bridge, scarcely leaving a pier standing, so that we had only to turn back by the way we came. Another crushing blow. If it had been some unholy errand, I might have taken these as so many signs that Heaven was against me and my work.

"What are you about?" I said, catching desperately at the reins, for the stupid boor was already turning his beast about. "Drive forward."

"But the bridge?"

En avant! Within ten minutes more the hoofs of the fleet mare began to clatter on the pavement, and

we were in the little posting town. But all in darkness except at the lower end, where there were torches moving about, and where all the inhabitants seemed to have collected. There were round us in an instant excited men, all talking together, with the torches flaring in the eyes of the fleet mare, and making her rear and plunge. Were the engineers come at last? When were they coming? There was not so much danger now, for the flood was beginning to fall. That giving way of the bridges had saved them.

“But the malle-poste?” I asked.

“Just arrived, but could go no further that night. To-morrow evening, when the boats were got up, and the bridge repaired, just temporarily—perhaps to-morrow night I might be set across.”

“Was there no drive round? No other bridge up or down?—no matter how much out of the way.”

“Yes, there was the wooden bridge some eight miles higher, but Monsieur must see what little chance it has when the great Saint Marsan bridge, quite new, and built of stone at enormous cost, had given way.”

“No boat?”

“No boat: all dashed to pieces in the flood, it had come so suddenly.”

It was all over, then. It was no use struggling with Destiny; and with a sort of heart-sick resolve of doing something—no matter what—I jumped to the ground, and made my way through the crowd and flaring torches to the river's edge. It went roaring by, a white, swollen sheet of foam; a great

broad river utterly impassable. I could see the jagged masonry where the new bridge had been rent away. It was utterly hopeless, and I turned back from the edge filled with despair, not caring what might become of me. I suppose as much could be gathered from my face; for they made way for me respectfully, and whispered together. Perhaps Jacquot's father had unfolded to them my little history, and the object of my journey; for I had remarked him earnest in conversation with certain of the crowd, gesticulating in a manner foreign to his nature, and pointing to the road behind, now across the river. At all events, an old man in a blouse made his way to me, and, touching his hat, asked if Monsieur was resolved to go forward that night, at all hazards. In the face of all risks, I said, nervously—why did he ask? Simply because, some six miles or so off, there was a ferry—used to be, that is, for it had been given up since the new bridge—with a boat drawn up under a shed. It had escaped, most likely. There the river was narrower, and for a good sack of money old Clou the ferryman might take me across.

From behind the torches voices of encouragement. "Ay! the very thing! Old Clou will take Monsieur, but he must have gold; and the Tigresse—Monsieur must not mind them if they swear and spit at him at first—let him clink the gold toujours! Let Monsieur be sure to take a couple of shovels!"

"Did he know the way?"

Jacquot's father did; confessing, with a stupid

bewilderment, that thought of Clou had never entered his head.

"Come along," he said, in his droning tone. A short respite at the inn for administering to the fleet mare a certain mash compounded by Jacquot's father's own hand, and we were off. Drawing new life and vigour from the cunning mash, the fleet mare started afresh by a flank road overhanging the river's side the whole way. All along that road we could hear the stream surging and roaring below, striving, as it were, with the fleet mare who should reach the ferry-house first; through a thick jungle most of the way; through mud and stones, knee-deep, the whole way; through sluices where the road had given and been washed down into the river, where a scoop had been bitten out as it were, where Jacquot's father had to get down and carefully lead round the fleet mare; through places where the bank had fallen in a great heap and completely stopped the road, forcing us to work wearily with the two shovels so thoughtfully supplied to us. At length the road began to slope steadily to the river's edge, the trees to crowd more thickly, and the fleet mare to slacken her pace, when, through a dense net-work of branches—a crowded tree-rigging, as it were—stood out the shape of a heavy log-tower, quite square, and hanging over to one side, with a strange tumble-down effect. Light, air, and the view of heaven were shut out by the choking tangle of trees and rank vegetation that wound round and round again that log-house; while, within reach of our hand,

we could hear the flood tumbling by, like an avalanche.

Jacquot's father got down and got through the branches to the door with much toil. It had been painted red, and still preserved a dull, smirched tint of that colour. Many of the logs gaped, and the huge upper stories hung over the lower like scowling eye-brows. It overhung the river a little, on a sort of stone pier; and at one side was a decayed shed, with the roof stripped off; where, no doubt, lay the ferry-boat. Altogether a stagnant, unwholesome, heart-crushing place.

Jacquot's father took a heavy stone and banged at the door, long and loud; but without any avail. I took up another stone and hammered with him; then, stepping back, looked up through the tree-rigging at the house. A flash of light came suddenly through a high chink, and there were sounds of bolts undoing. Said a voice high up—and a voice of snarling, miawling tone, such as comes from a cat gathered up in a corner with arched back and flashing eyes—"Get away! Get you gone, robbers! I have boiling water here, and boiling pitch, of which you shall have mouthfuls, if you are not gone in two seconds."

"It is the Tigresse," said Jacquot's father, in a low voice; "let us go, as she bids us."

"Are you gone?" croaked another voice, in a feeble cackle, from behind the first. "We have guns up here, we have—Ki-ki!—and the pitch! by the Lord! and the dog, Ki-ki! At them! tear them! down to them, sweet fellow!"

Then came a deep, solemn growl, and sounds of tramping down steps. They were coming, it was plain.

"Speak to them, Monsieur, quickly," said Jacquot's father, trembling.

"We are travellers," I said, in a loud voice, "and wish to be taken across the river."

First voice hooted devilishly—it was laughter.

"Ki-ki, Clou ! let him down, sweet soul !"

"But you shall have money—gold."

"Gold? Then, stop! Ki-ki! Hold him! The Monsieur will pay."

The bolt suddenly shot back, and a great white dog, shaggy as a mountain pony, and with two red-hot coals for eyes, bounded out with a spring like a flash of light. Behind it, with another spring, came a strange white-haired object, which, casting a horn-lantern behind it, flew at the throat of the white dog, and, winding its arms round it, threw it over, and finally dragged it in again. Then taking up her lantern—for it looked most like a woman having an old blue blanket round her—she stood in the doorway confronting us. "Now," she said, "what of that gold?"

She was a horrid apparition. No teeth; no skin, only creased leather; no arms, only fleshless bones. On her head, an old fur-cap.

"Now," she said again, "what about the gold?"

I chinked it musically in its purse.

"Come in," she said, "and speak to Clou."

A ladder, and another horrid object at the top,

holding a light—a horrid object, with nose and chin sharply crooked, like a parrot's bill, and one eye beaten in; dwarfish too in figure, and full of an elfish activity. This was the Old Wolf.

"Why do you let them in, Ki-ki?" he said, dancing at the top of the ladder. "They can't come up; you know they can't. I won't let them up. I won't."

"Stand away, Clou, or be brained with this key. I spit at you."

"Ahr-rr-r! Would you, Tigresse? I'll claw your heart out."

"Cr-r-r-r! You one-eyed imp, where's your throat?" she said, now at the top of the ladder, and pushing him back. "Here is a Monsieur come with gold, and are we not to take him in?"

By the light of the lantern she was leering horribly. For a moment I turned to go down and leave the spot; but I thought of the end and object of my journey, and stayed.

The Old Wolf was growling to himself in a corner. We were still at the top of the ladder.

"Will you take them over?" said the Tigresse.

"No, no," snarled the Wolf. "Let them go. Ah-r-r!"

The Tigresse bounded at him, and I saw her long claws scraping his throat. He gnawed and shrieked, then got free, and grovelled.

"There!" said the Tigresse, putting back her grizzled hair, "you will get as much every minute if you cross me. Open the window, and look out at the river."

He did as he was bidden, cursing her; and we saw

the black river below rushing on in a desperate race.

"Good," said the Tigresse, "it is slackening; we will take you over in an hour's time. Wait in here, there is a fire."

"Hoo, hoo," whined the Old Wolf, crawling on all fours to the door. "Not in here; not as yet: you know why, don't you?"

"Pig-brained! not done of that yet! Let me see." She entered with the lantern, snatching up a cloth, and we heard sounds of rubbing. "Now come in; sit by the fire, and don't heed dotard Clou—the Old Wolf, they call him. Why, he has no teeth."

"But I can draw blood for all that," he said with a grin.

She gave a glare from her cat's eyes, and screaming to him, "Go out! You shan't stay to chatter here!" dragged him away.

There was a rude stool—the only seat in the place—against the wall, which I drew over to the fire, and then sat down. There were a few logs in the corner, which I took and threw on the fire. Jacquot's father, however, would not come near it; but kept roaming round the room like a panther in his den, muttering to himself uneasily concerning his mare. How she would break loose and be lost in the forest, or else be carried away by robbers; all in a sort of whining grumble, common, as I have before noted, to the boors of his own region. So at last I told him he might go down and look after her himself. He departed hastily, leaving me alone over the fire. No sign of the Old

Wolf or the Tigresse, whom I heard at odd intervals wrangling shrilly.

I was very weary and tired, and kept stirring the logs and looking about the room to keep myself awake. The log-room itself might have been the upper chamber of an old wooden lighthouse; for the sides slanted in straight up to the roof, or to the black void which might be the roof, gallery, lantern, any thing. The sides were plain undressed logs of an old red wood, bolted together very rudely, like the interior of an old Dutch windmill, its axle of melancholy creak at rest for the night, up in the bleak void. Two or three cabin-windows, high up and beyond reach, cut in the log walls, with heavy outside shutters, slapped to at every gust. A great seaman's chest with a large lid stood in the corner. Logs of wood were heaped up all about. Logs for the fire by themselves, in a high black heap in another corner. An open trap in the floor, through which we had come up into the room, with two blocks and pulleys fixed high up in the wall.

Eyes beginning to grow heavy; fire beginning to burn up with a gentle glow, terribly provocative of sleep, at the same time jerking strange shadows in spasms on the red walls of the old Dutch mill—of the Ferry-house, I mean—Grindoff the miller, and his Men. Eye-lids drooping wearily; for “When the wind blows, Then the mill goes, And our hearts are all blithe and merry,” and Grindoff the miller, the Old Wolf—I mean Royal Adelphi Theatre—and his Men, filing across, each with a white sack on his back, over the

bridge, up the slope, up the ladder into the mill, all into the mill,—“when the wind blows!”—with Count Frederick, Friedrich Friburg, in green hussar-jacket and Hessians, who has lost his way, and the funny serving-man, who has lost his way too, both now nodding drowsily over the fire in the mill. Now, supposing that person Grindoff the miller;—what can he have those little bulk-heads and hooks for? To swing up his sacks when the mill goes? To swing up Count Friedrich and the funny serving-man, coming on them from behind as they sleep? Soft music. What if he, Grindoff, should come up the trap in list shoes, and should steal behind me as I sleep, and take something from beneath his miller’s frock, and suddenly despatch me—then lift the trap? Or if he set his mill agoing to its own melancholy creaking music, and thrust it—the body—behind the mill-stones to be ground up and crunched? Horrible!

Eye-lids drooping yet more wearily; logs glowing fiercely; forked shadows leaping spasmodically as before. Setting aside Grindoff for a moment, I inclined to believe that the wicked old parents of the Fatal Curiosity must have lived here, up in this grim Dutch mill.

Looking out from the rude cabin-windows, it seems to me that it has suddenly grown to be the evening of a long day’s travel, and that afar off at the head of the pass I can see the two figures toiling along. The young man looks back: he has on a scarlet foraging-cap, with a blue military cloak.

“Courage, friend,” he calls to the gray sergeant,

lagging a little behind him ; “ we shall soon be home ; ”
and he sings—

“ Home to the mountain chalet,
By the river, on the river ;
Where golden-haired Mary is spinning,
Where golden-haired Mary is singing,
By the river, on the river.”

And as they both turn round a rock, the darkness of evening seems to gather fast, and the lines and colouring of the great Salvator crags quiver unsteadily ; fading off eventually into the red logs of the old Ferry-house, with the fire flickering up as before, the forked shapes dancing galvanically as before, and I myself sitting before the fire with my head sunk down upon my chest.

It was curious how I had come by that notion of the young man and the gray sergeant. Most likely it was Barbou and his wars of the empire which had first set it agoing, bringing with it floating notions of the old guard and grand army, and furlough : all jumbled together during that long, night's travel. But the young man in the scarlet foraging-cap, chanting with such light heart of his golden-haired Marie, far away in some sunny country where are no rough blasts and horrid gorges,—whence had I gotten him ? Somewhere on the road ; perhaps a stage or so from Moulines, and they were the sweetest notes I ever heard. The Reverend Tristram Sterne, looking from his chaise windows, said so once. Sentimental journey that is—dozing again for a certainty—I should keep awake. He might have been journeying home from the great

wars in Algeria, having run many risks and passed through every hardship: he might have come across the sea, struggling with terrible storms and tempest, striving to get home with all speed to that green spot where Little Constancy, long expecting and sitting up of nights, would be waiting wearily. Bound up solemnly to be back against a great festival day; and so from the high cabin-window I look out for him again and for the gray sergeant. Making him out at length, still speeding on, but without the gray sergeant, who will come later. Still he sings—

“Home to the mountain chalet,

By the river, on the river,” &c.

And then he turns aside into a path through a thick jungle, seemingly along a river-bank, for I can catch the roar of waters hard by; altogether I should know something of that way—a tree here and rock there, having something familiar in the look. I must have come by that road once, and that not long since, which becomes positive. Certainly, as the road widens apace, and the jungle thickens, and the roar comes nearer, a little to one side comes into view a dark mass. The old log Ferry-house, it must be, where he halts and knocks, for he is very weary, and would fain rest until the gray sergeant should come up. The door closes behind him, and I see him no more.

No more, that is, until looking round the log-cabin, at the heap in the corner, at the great sea-chest, and at those curious blocks and pulleys up high, and at the trap (or what looks like a trap) opening just under them, I begin to speculate what they can have done with

him. Blocks, pulleys, and trap-opening in conjunction. Suggestive of cruel extremity for the young soldier, alone, and the prey of Clou and the Tigresse. If, now, there was a rope reefed through the pulley, and the trap lifted, then it might be swung down lightly to the river below, and so be swept away, and never heard of more; and the spoils—the Algerian money won by hard fighting, the scarlet foraging-cap, the blue cloak with its fur,—they might have been put by hastily, and be lying, at this instant, in the great sea-chest.

Either the door slammed or a log fell from the fire, for I started suddenly, and the red walls of the log-cabin were again quivering indistinctly under spasmodic light that came down the fire as before, settling down in steady shape and substance. Block and pulleys as before, trap as before, cabin-windows as before, great sea-chest—No, the great sea-chest is not as before; for, as I can make it out in its dark corner, the lid is raised, and there is a dark and dwarfish figure stooping over and half buried in it. Clou it must be; for I could hear him muttering strange oaths, his head being still deep in the chest. Presently there was a step behind me, and the Tigresse came creeping over the floor, lifting her feet stealthily, like a cat. Coming behind him she took hold of his collar with her claws, drew him back out of the chest. Then their two horrid faces came close together, lit up by sudden flashes of the fire, leering distrustfully at me. Then they whispered and snarled, and showed their teeth at one another, and the Tigresse took from under her arm something rolled up, which they spread out between them—some-

thing that looked like a large blue cloak of many folds, bordered with fur. This was laid down carefully in the sea-chest, and they both crept away to the door.

I rubbed my eyes. What can this mean? I must have been dreaming. Something whispered it was plainly time to be gone from that place, for I seemed to be standing within the shadow of some unholy deed. Had I been dreaming, and had that groping of Clou and the Tigresse, deep in the sea-chest, been nothing more than so much ghostly dozing set afloat by objects about me? Likely enough; and yet something terribly real in that spreading-out by the Tigresse of what looked so like a blue cloak of many folds, bordered with fur! It did not look like a dream; it were best surely to be gone. The wind was going down, and I could hear the sharp neighing of the fleet mare below, as she was being walked about to keep her from being chilled. One look into the great sea-chest would resolve all doubts. I rose from the rude stool, and lifted the lid softly. I could see nothing, that corner was so dark; but exploring it cautiously with my hands, it appeared to be filled up with old sacks. Miller and his Men over again. Turning up the sacks hurriedly, and delving to the very bottom, my fingers came upon a bundle that felt like soft cloth. Unrolling it with feverish haste, and holding it to the fire-light, it proved to be indeed a blue cloak, richly bordered with fur, and a bright scarlet foraging-cap wrapped up among its folds!

* * * * *

The Tigresse was standing over me as I leant towards the fire.

"Ah!" she shrieked, "you are spying on us! Here, Clou, Clou—quick! Come up, quick!"

I heard him stumbling on the ladder-steps, and rushed to the door. But she kept clawing before me, with one hand behind, whining all the while with rage.

"So you would look into the chest—look into the chest! Yine! yine! Quick, Clou!"

"What is it, sweet Tigresse?" said he, his horrid head now on a level with the door.

"He has been at our chest. Yine!" she snarled. "He must not go!"

"No, no!" said Clou, crawling round me on the floor. He had drawn something out of his breast—something that glittered.

With a spring I was at the cabin-window, and threw it open, about to call to Jacquot's father, when suddenly there came from below a steady voice, calling. They stopped and listened.

"What is it, Tigresse?" said Clou, putting back what had been glittering.

"Good people," the voice said; "good people, have you seen any one go by this night? A young man, that is?"

"Ah-r-r-r!" muttered Clou.

"Go down to him, Clou," the Tigresse said, in a low voice. "Send him away. Let the dog upon him if he does not go."

"Ay!" said Clou, going down the ladder. "Wait, he shall help you to take care of him yonder. Hop-hop! come up, beauty! come up, sweet child!"

And the white brute came scrambling up the ladder.

"Now, stir or speak," said the Tigresse, catching him round the throat, "and the sweet one shall lap up your blood—she is thirsty to-night."

"Good people," the voice came again, "don't keep an old soldier waiting."

* * * * *

"He is gone," said Clou, coming up the ladder again; "gone on to the town, where he will find his friend, no doubt; and what shall we do with him?"

"Mordieu! what do we wait for?" said another figure, climbing the ladder behind him—Jacquot's father. "The flood is gone down a good bit, and the wind does not blow—why do we not cross, I say?"

They looked at us a moment, then the Tigresse whispered Clou a moment.

"There is sense in that," he said at length. "Why should we not go? Let us take the gentleman across at once."

They descended, we following. I did not know what to think; but, at all events, was glad to be free from that horrid place.

We came out into the open air upon a sort of little stage or pier. An old rusty chain ran across, by which we were to be drawn over.

"It is very old," said Clou, looking at it, "and it creaks." Here he grinned. "Pay the Tigresse now, before we go."

It was a broad, flat-bottomed boat, very crazy and decayed. We got the fleet mare on board with diffi-

culty, and set off, leaving the *Tigresse* on the pier looking after us.

Though the waters had gone down considerably, it was still a desperate task to get the boat across. We had all to hold on and work at the chain, while the boat reeled and swung round, and was every instant on the point of being carried away. But we got across at last, and were set on shore safely at the other side.

We were settled in the light cart once more, and the fleet mare bounded away full of life and spirit. Just then we saw the day breaking through the trees, and, looking back, there was Clou coddled up under a tree, waiting till the river should have sunk enough for his own simple strength.

What was the mystery of that night, I never could resolve. I looked afterwards through French newspapers with hope of lighting on something that would clear it up, but unprofitably. Perhaps there was nothing in it after all. Perhaps I had fallen off into dreaming after discovery of that cloak and cap, and so had furnished key-notes for my weary brain to run riot on.

However that may be, I have now only this to tell; —that I made the rest of my journey in all speed and safety, and was soon in London streets, with London flashing by, driving on to my own home, where Little Constancy was sitting up nearly restored, waiting with certain hope and confidence for my return upon her birthday.

"A—h!" said Cheerful Horn, rubbing his hands; "so that's the way it came out! I'm very glad you got safe out of that business—very glad, indeed!"

There was a pause; and I perceived that several faces were bent on me with a sort of air of exaction. It now seemed to be understood—without any formal agreement to that effect—that there should be a sort of *Railway Night's Entertainment*, and that each in turn should contribute to the public amusement.

So, when Cheerful Horn, turning his instrument full towards me, obstreperously claimed my share, I was already prepared with a rough, savage legend concerning an old house I had once lived opposite to, and which, somehow, was in excellent tone and keeping with my present frame of mind. I call it *The Wildgrove-Street Mystery*—and I am afraid delivered it in a rude, blunt fashion, which must have surprised my hearers, but which must be excused by the reason just mentioned.

THE WILDGROVE-STREET MYSTERY.

It was the fortune of that great house never to lie long tenantless—having therefore but indifferent reputation among persons connected with the care-taking profession. Very soon, then, the neighbours knew that the process of house metempsychosis had again taken place, and that a fresh soul had passed into the brick-and-plaster body. Such as bore clamorous stomachs, whose importunate cravings must needs be promptly stayed, made out before nightfall that the new tenants were *Cleverly Bedloe, Esquire*, and his wife, who, with their

servants, would have the great house all to themselves; which scant tenancy gave prodigious dissatisfaction, as being unproductive, in the highest degree, of action and gossip-stimulant. And certain prying ones, having noted long foolscap rolls making entrance at dusk, fled straight to the Law List, and there, indeed, read of one Cleverly Bedloe, Esquire, of the Inner Temple, Barrister—man of law, then, beyond mistake, was the new tenant. Not of the blatant declamatory department either (as it was ascertained by careful inquiry), for he had no blue bag to go forth with as familiar; but rather of the sit-at-home scribbling and opinionative line, and, unhappily, precious little work in that special walk. So our blessed gossips were completely balked of all hope of looking on him or (what was more grievous still) upon her, and of greedily devouring their passeport signalement, tone of face, tint, outline, and the rest. Poor newsmongers! it was hard trial enough for them!

Now, looking in privily into one of the great chambers one dusky December evening, when men in the streets are skipping up their ladders lamp-lighting, and through the dull gray fog, we shall see our two lonely tenants, man and wife, sitting together over their coals. They are as two specks in the great chamber, as two creatures under the dome of a great cathedral. Man—to read out that passeport signalement—man, some eight-and-thirty years old, perhaps more—between two ages, as Frenchmen say; forehead high, teint pale, outline sharp and hatchety, hair thin and scattered, mouth a little pinched. Altogether (to

go outside our four passeport corners) signs of thought, of study, and of genius—signs, too, that white, drum-tight skin specially, of pain, trouble, and weary nights; a restless manner about him, a look as though he had passed through fire of some sort. This much for man. For wife now, sitting near him. Long-haired she was, and yellow-haired, too; very fair in tint, light-eyed, milk-faced, and slender-limbed. An insipid piece of goods, critical souls would have pronounced; yet, under surface, a very gentle-natured piece of goods—praying, it is to be feared, to the flesh-god beside her quite as heartily as to that Greater Being. To the husband-god she every day said her acts of faith, hope, and charity—her credo, her *In te, Domine, confido*: Let me not be confounded. A good-natured, fighting thing, given to tears and pouts on smallest invitation. Brain-box, it is to be suspected, not over-ballasted, and prompting her now and then to absurd, extravagant spurts. Here, then, were man and wife over their coals. He was Cleverly, as was said before; she Janet. They had been married two years, or thereabout.

Such as knew our man better than the gossips of the street, knew, in a sort of misty way, that he had, indeed, passed through a great furnace, much scorched and scarred, but still had passed. Where, indeed, he had been playing Shadrach and his brethren, those parties could no more than hint at. He had been working famously in the profession, nay, had all but put his foot on the Queen's Counsellors' ladder, when there came suddenly a break. Something Delilah-faced was looking at him through the rungs—before long had

drawn him round to the other side. Hoodwinking him with his own bag, she had led him off countrywards. The counsellor's grand ladder was lost to him for that time at least—perhaps for a good quarter of a century. Then had come the furnace and the fire—safe passage. Delilah flouted and complete victory. Here he was striving vainly to reach back to his place in the Grand National Forensic Derby, struggling with whip and spur to set himself free of the ruck. As yet with but feeble success. Often he had said to himself—"I shall tell her the whole history—the whole chronicle of my battle and my victory! She should know it. I should conceal nothing from her. Dear, trusting creature! she will only respect me the more for such confidence." Then he would shrink back from the business, ashamed and doubtful of the consequence. Then think it for the best, then for the worst. Finally ended the matter with a stroke; and of that dusky December evening, when the gray tints were outside, and the lamp-lighters busy, he was in the midst of his story, telling her all particulars. What would neighbouring gossips have given even for painful key-hole accommodation! He told it all in the darkness: she could not see his face, neither could he see how his yarn affected her. It was not a long business, and so may be told here in a short space, keeping clear of all personalism and repeated egodom.

The fair-faced, well-meaning girl beside him had been intended for him from the time she had eaten bread-and-butter in the nursery. Nurses and house-keeper had always preached it to her that she was to

be Mrs. Cleverly Bedloe one of those days, and that she was being reared for that special vocation. To which end, therefore,—to glorifying the great lawyer up in London and outer judge in posse—she consumed her farinaceous aliment and butter, and took pole-exercise and first positioning, even to ankle spraining, and prodigious grinding in the modern tongues. When Mr. Cleverly was fairly afloat and in full swing, he was to come down, and he would find a young woman all ready waiting for him. He came accordingly, and found something far beyond what he had reckoned on—a fright he had expected, or a gawk at least; and here, on the contrary, was something very comely and shapeful. Now he, having lived mostly with books—which, as all the world knows, have neither flesh nor blood, nor beauty of any kind—ran into an extreme, and foolishly took her to be more than she was. She had, for him, celestial stuff in her; but for that poor furnishing of the brain-box, it quite escaped him. So, in excellent humour, he went up to London, to come again next vacation, when she should be of fitting age and ready (according to paternal will) for tying of the nuptial double knot. Poor miss, hot from the nursery and the White Cat and Puss in Boots, thought she had never seen so radiant a creature, and pined for him.

At the Christmas season, then coming on, our Cleverly went down to the country-house of a big-wig of stupendous proportions. Law Leviathan, he might be called. To be permitted to walk behind him in his shadow was indeed distinction; but to be taken into his bosom, for next to certain advancement. So he

went down, joyfully pitching his bag to unholy hands to hold for him. But mark! Law Leviathan had a daughter.

Now this daughter, whose name was Mary, being one of those piratical Barbary slavers whose trade it is to swoop down from unseen creeks, rifle, and then cut the pillaged craft adrift, being a tall, dazzling creature, run in Spanish mould, whose every turn and movement was a flash, how was it likely to fare with our poor advocate on furlough? Before one week was out, she was down upon him from her creek, and had stripped him of his precious freight—freight, alack! which he should have borne to another port! Cruel Barbary slaver! Old Leviathan sees nothing, perhaps heeds nothing. He has brought down some delightful reading for disengaged hours—the new volume of the Equity Reports. Our barrister is sent back, scornfully, to town, to stomach law now, if he can. But such a sorry sight—sails in rags, spars shattered!

Henceforth he shall be decadent. Legal papers are flung, as is only natural, to the four-footed companions of man. He himself, if he writes at all, writes odes—maudlin, namby-pamby odes. He is up and down eternally on some pretext or another. Sneers and scoffs stop him not; he becomes abject and drivelling, gets into premature love-dotage. Away fly briefs, fluttering, rustling through the air, to Counsellor Silvertongue's yonder.

The worst feature in the matter was this: that he could not be brought to approach that quarter to which he was bound, by all honourable laws, even by promise

solemnly given to dying father. Always some pretext—pretence, rather—in the way. Fair-haired Janet grows anxious, troubled, fretful. His conscience highway is not altogether so smooth for him; he has twinges of compunction, troubled nights, terrible inward struggles. He prays hard (for once he had gone half-way into the church); is wakened one night by storm in the heavens, windows rattling, chimneys, tiles tumbling about him; falls on his knees in cold sweat, and promises to be good. He will strive and wrestle with the fiend (his defunct parent had been an honest field Puritan); will try what his wretched will can do for him. Then for a short space or so, makes some way; then falls back again, say, double as much; then struggles out of the slough again. In the thick of which fluctuation comes news that Leviathan's daughter has been wedded suddenly to an Indian General.

Impotent rage and stampings at first,—tears even, and then supreme dejection. After which follows sudden awakening, as from a dream or nightmare, with fierce and sudden purpose of thorough amendment, as being only plank of deliverance left. Sad tugging at heart-strings, cruellest wrenching, despairing prayers, crying, and finally the work is done victoriously. He has dragged it forth, with torn, bleeding roots; and goes down to the country triumphantly, a worn look upon his face, to fulfil what honour called upon him to fulfil.

Now, when he was thus landed at the end of his confessions, and looking round innocently for strong sympathetic adhesion and words of praise, he was of a

sudden startled by a short cry from her, with convulsion and all manner of gaspings. He was on his feet in an instant, quite dumb-founded, and went to fetch help. Passing Æsculapius, collared and dragged in, found her, not indeed performing that sharp hysteria music, but moaning piteously, with hand laid to her side.

Æsculapius looked as wise as he could manage to be; went through his ancient forms, pulse-touching and the rest; blew his cheeks out handsomely, and took her husband down by the button-hole to the gloomy study.

"Sir," Æsculapius said, very owl-like, "it is serious—very serious. We are in danger. We are on the edge of a precipice."

"Heaven help us!" the husband said, aghast. "What do you mean?"

"The heart, my dear sir. Long-standing disease of that organ!" And then adds, that in future there must be the nicest care; no agitation—no excitement; not so much as the fall of a book.

So Æsculapius helped her through that bout—took fees, and went his way eventually, with longing look backwards.

But for Barrister Cleverly, how was it to be with him henceforward? The simple truth was, he had cut a rod and furnished pickle too, all for his own punishment. A cat rather, with prodigious number of tails, all neatly thonged, and silk-whipped by his own ridiculous fingers, which instrument Madam, now sofa-ridden, and with invalid airs, kept by her in her little cabinet, and, to do her justice, took it out some six

times in the day. (And which of our dear sisters, who have got so sweet a flail in their keeping, would let it stiffen and gather dust?) The man led a dog's life. Invalid Madam, from her sofa, twitted him, scoffed at him, nay, at times, shrieked at him: a poor deluded creature, she called herself; basely deceived, dragged under false pretence into marriage. If he was gloomy (well he might be), he was thinking of his stately queen! If he made effort to be cheerful, he was play-acting! Therefore all day long his trade was to be a soothing of her, and fencing off of these fits, by all manner of devices. For it had been carefully kept from her, that she had in her bosom an enemy known as Sudden Death! In which process of soothing she had much secret gratification, even a little pride and triumph. As for that other trade of his, it went, to use a blunt phrase, to pot. Went, hopelessly, to pot. He had the beak, not of the poor sot-poet's raven, but of a hen—eternally in his heart, from which it seemed likely to be lifted never more. Sometimes, goaded to fury, he would start up in fiercest protest—when he would see that menacing spectre fluttering near to her left side, ready to strike. So he would check himself at once, and rush forth, grinding his teeth.

He was clubless; and used, therefore, after such explosions, to wander about the lonely streets of the neighbourhood. It was grown to be old-fashioned; the nobility and gentry having moved westward. But it was fast rising in favour with another interest, mainly outdoor; and might soon hope to be christened Costermongria.

Among such locomotive traders used Barrister Cleverly steer his way despondingly, thinking he might have a more endurable time of it behind one of the carts, until he got into even lonelier districts. Roaming once thus listlessly, one evening, having flung himself out of the house careless whither he went, he strayed away until he was stopped by a sort of canal, once indeed a great traffic road, but now quite green and stagnant. Very tempting it looked, as absorbent for all earthly sorrows. Heavy woes might lie undisturbed below its thick mud sediment! Cheap Necropolis for the outcast, and most economical Funeral Company! If such dismal thoughts were rioting in our Barrister's head, it was as matters of pure speculation. He had no such unholy purpose by him; but still had unaccountable yearning for the quiet solitude of that mud. Nay, towards the end of his speculation, he was in a gentler frame of mind towards his plague at home. Poor soul! he thought, there is much excuse for her. So there was.

Then he turned home, through the wilds of Costermongria again. Rude flaring illumination showed him such tempting wares: their melodious tongues expatiated on the famous quality of the wares. As he turned a corner into districts something more civilised, a dark brougham, whose clatter had been deafening him for some time back, pulled up sharp under the lamp, the coachman calling to him to know the way. A lady's face was put forth from the window, listening.

"Why," said a voice that made him start, "'tis Mr. Cleverly! What a curious meeting!"

Mrs. Lavender, Leviathan's daughter! Why she was in India, beyond the seas, unthought of, undreamt of, to all purposes dead and buried tropically. So, to him it might have been as well a ghost looking forth from a brougham-window. He made as though he would fly.

"Come," she called to him, "are you not glad to see an old friend? Get in, and I will set you down any where out of this Robinson Crusoe's island."

So he got in, not yet recovered, and was driven away by Delilah—a very small Samson, though.

Did he find her changed? What did he think of her livery? Was it unbecoming? allusion not to her retainer's garment, but to a little white frill that ran round her face. So then, he asks, with another start, was her India General underground?

"Yes," she answered; "neither do I grieve for him. Why should I sham it? He hated me, and I hated him. So we lived the old-established cat-and-dog life over again. Cat had the best of it, I fancy."

Our caged Barrister listened spell-bound. Could it be that a certain old devil, whom he had caught and chained up after desperate battle, more than three years before, was kicking a little, ever so little, inside of him?

"Now," she went on, "I am free as air. I live as a gay widow-princess, and I can assure you the men worshipers muster strong. They are prostrate all day long before the throne. You may go on your knees, if you like, with the rest. Tell me of yourself, now."

When he began by telling her, not without a sort of craven shyness, that he was married, she burst into a perfect scream of laughter, most genuine and diverting to hear. It was such a comic notion; such a famous idea. She could see the whole *ménage* at that moment: a humdrum, dowdy thing, she could swear it was, without much brains, no *esprit*, inclined to think him the wisest genius in the world. Could swear, too, he was let out by a string every day; home to the minute. Candidly, was not that a true picture?

His tinkling cheeks said "Yes" for him: the wicked goblin inside said "Yes" also for him, with a nervous kick.

"But," she went on, in high good humour, "I can't have you now. You must stay at home with your lawful spouse, Heaven bless her! I don't suffer wedded men to come a-worshiping. The name of my castle, sir, is Propriety Hall. We must set you down somewhere here, for we are not far from home now. Stop!"

The door was opened, and, curious to say, where one only had entered, two parties actually got out, that is to say, Cleverly and the black gentleman, who had now got the fastenings off his legs, and was all but free.

She had not done her shrieks of laughter, when he had been set down. "Good by, Benedict," she said, scarcely able to speak; "get home to the loving one that waits for thee. Don't come near me; you can't be admitted." And the brougham then drove on.

"Have I fought to death nearly, only for this?"

he said. If it was to come all over again, he felt that he might as well give in at once, for he had not strength for the encounter. At the bare notion of those horrid nights of wrestle and conflict, a cold sweat burst out on his forehead. "I cannot go through it all again," he said, and straight began pattering prayers in Scripture phrases, calling desperately on the Lord to be his helper and deliverer. He came home moody, and was received with a burst of satirical railing from the sofa. What was he about in these evening walks of his? Who was he after now? Pity the Indian lady could not be got for him, he must find his company so dull. She unhappily was not one of those dazzling creatures, the mere turn of whose head was a flash; together with as much more in the same provocative strain. Guiltily enough looked Cleverly, as she thus unwittingly touched on the true state of things; but there was no lamp lighted as yet, and so he could blush securely. Under cover of that darkness, too, he could chafe and grind his teeth responsively to her railing, making comparison under his breath between two women, one so noble, full of fire, scintillating like prismatic spar; the other, so earthy, so dronish and petty. "The other," he said, "is free, free as air; while here am I bound eternally to this shrew."

This was not so much the purport of that one night's rumination, as essence concentrated of many more, for nearly a fortnight following. During which period this new yeast fermented exceedingly within him, even to working of a strange change. For, oh! who shall conceive it of our praying, wrestling, thought-

fullest, and most spiritual man of law, he had so filtered out of him all the dross of passion, that he had actually crept back covertly to that district where he had parted from his queen; having in his mind that saying of hers, that she lived not very far from thence. Treasuring up which talisman, he stole in sneaking fashion into divers shops and offices, putting interrogatories, until at last he was told of the number and house he sought. Towards which domicile he was henceforth used to wander every night, in a foolish distracted way, with eyes yearningly directed to the illuminated windows and figure-shadows flitting athwart the blinds. Finally, brings himself to knock with timorous fingers, and ask if Mrs. Lavender is at home.

For which knock that lady, who was, with her other perfections, actress most consummate, had been looking out with prodigious anxiety. "Don't come near me," she had said, scornfully; but meaning something wholly different. She lacked a little excitement, and what better than that of punishing this recalcitrant? "The fool," she said as she waited, "the poor empty fool! It is not a man of his soft wits that shall attempt to play me such tricks! Why, fellows have turned monks for me before this; and he is to fatten and be domestic, and get a wife! He shall pay for meddling with sharp tools. I'll make him gash those mean impudent fingers of his!"

Sweetly and composedly, though, she received him, who floundered in like a bashful boy. "I told you not to come," she said; "I will not encourage such doings. Our roads are quite different."

He then, protesting that he had come but to renew an old friendship—

“Friendship!” she exclaimed, with a meaning look, “I like that word;” and before the close of that interview, she had conveyed by broadest hint to the man, that by compulsion only had she been wedded to the Indian General. Something unexpressed, save by sigh, conveyed even more. Wretched Cleverly drinks the poison, and goes his way with mad and wicked exultation; goes back again the next day, and so on for a sinful fortnight.

At home he sits moodily, making bitter comparison between his dull, dark, hopeless house, with that invalid, unspiritual she-clod for mistress, with that other bright tabernacle where, amid flowers, gems, and perfumes, sat enthroned a matchless sultana, whose very glance was a winged thought, whose speech was wit, and wisdom, and sarcasm. It was a cellar beside a palace; sudden change from the cave of the gnomes to the bright halls of fairyland. His destiny might have been—nay, worse, MIGHT BE!—in that brighter sphere, only for this log to which he was chained. His rough looks and bearing, as he thought these things over, quite cowed that railing woman. Thus he went back every evening for more poison. But mark what our Canidia next put into his draught.

She takes to flattering of him; puffs him with exaggerated praise (this of some blissful evening, in her perfumed bower, with worshipers, men only, gathered about her); hinting that he had not so much as suspicion of his own surpassing qualities. Why

should not a man of his deep thought aspire to be spokesman in the great talking house? Instruct his fellows, pen in hand? In short, be King, or Canning, cleverly, as Mr. Carlyle puts it? Had he never put it to himself whether this was not his great destiny, after all? But what was she saying? Ah! she had forgotten. He had already chosen his walk. His was the gentler, but more inglorious office of tending sickly wife, chronicling smallest beer, in short. Well! all she could say was, pity it had not been ordered otherwise.

That was a handsome dose for one night. Of another it would be to this tune:—Her late husband had, as all the world knew, rather less brains than Pompey, that dog there. Oh, if she had been joined with some man of lofty aspirations! of ambition! of iron will! whom she could bow down before, and with whom she could work an incomparable mission! Well! it could not be helped now. It was all over now.

More deadly hellebore. The animal vanity of the man was afire, and he strode into his own den of terrors with a lofty strut, and such a look of loathing at the poor querulous thing on the sofa. "But for this burden, this drag" (again and again he said it to himself), "there should be another sort of existence for me." She, poor soul! had grown much more tractable and silent of late, complaining of a dull pain in the left side. These constant outgoings of night, and her bitter speculations on them, set her all fluttering and palpitating.

One of these famous nights at our Circe's house,

when she had her bowers lighted up, and a troop of her slaves (men always) wandering in the bowers, and she herself shone radiantly, she said to Cleverly :

“I have not told you as yet. This is to be our last pleasant *réunion*.”

“The last !” gasps our ex-barrister.

“Yes,” she answers, tuning down her voice to mournfullest key. “I go to Paris to-morrow—to Paris, the gay and the glittering ! And yet I am sorry to go, sorrier than I would have been a month since. You shall see me there and be proud of me. But I always forget, you have tender duties to look to. Never mind !” she added, with a burst of laughter, “you will have a crown of glory hereafter for it. Adieu !”

In what condition of mind that wretched Cleverly went home may be conceived, perhaps not so well described. Went home, too, through a deluge of rain, which he heeded not. He was desperate, furious, out of himself. Something, too, awaited him that was not likely to soothe that temper of his. For the sickly wife, for many nights now wholly deserted, and tossing uneasily on her sofa, what with thinking and fretting over this cruel neglect, was now carrying in that left side of hers a long sharp knife never likely to be drawn out. She was thinking, too, by way of contrast, of those country days when she was a girl ; of the scent of the hay (that hay-scent coming back always with yearning and acute wringing of the heart) ; of her father, so rough and blunt, and yet so good and gentle to her ; and of that mother who, all along, was

averse to the whole business, and prophesied that no good would come of it. Oh, those country days, seen through effulgence as of setting sun; low-lying white house, with embroidery of honeysuckle and creeping plants; gently sloping sward, where the children played: all to be now looked out at from afar, from barred prison windows! For which she had now coldness, insult, and neglect. When a woman finds her dear husband taking particularly to going abroad from her, she perches almost at once on one conclusion, namely, that it can only be one of her sex that has to do with the business, and, true or false, charges him boldly with the disloyalty. Which notion only came home to the poor sick lady on this wretched tossing night, and her thin cheek flushed up as she thought of her prodigious discovery.

“To have given up all for this!” she said, wearily, for someway the knife was piercing her deeper every instant. “I will speak to him, though I die for it!”

When, therefore, he came in, striding heavily, with wild eyes, and all streaming with wet; when he had flung himself heavily into a chair, and sat there, leaning on his elbows, without addressing to her a word, —the feeble woman on the sofa lifted herself up and let loose upon him a torrent of bitter reproaches, mingled injudiciously with taunts and foolish gibes, which began in low plaintive tones, mingled with sobs, but swelled in time to angry shriek and menace. She knew well what game he was playing! But let him take care! She would expose him! She would un-

mask him before the world, if she were to go out into the streets and die before his eyes! If he did not like her, he should keep up the common decencies of life to her. This was touching him on points of vanity and other sore places, when he burst in furiously on her speech, starting to his feet.

All his rage and night's disappointment came forth in that furious diatribe. It seemed as if a devil had gotten into the man temporarily. Such vindictive taunts were unworthy of the most outraged husband; but, to a poor, sick, helpless woman, how unmanly! Like her! love her! hissing out the words at her. He told her that he had never had so much as the smallest particle of regard for her, and that he had been acting a part to her all his life. That now he disliked!—yes, disliked and shrunk from her, from his soul he did! He cursed the day he was induced to wed her. He wished——

That cheek of hers, grown suddenly pale again, and that hand pressed so convulsively on her side, should have served as warning to stay those wicked words of his. Often before, when such words had been on their road to his lips, he had taken heed of such warning, and checked them before utterance, gulped them down impatiently. But now——

Does he shut his eyes, or turn his head away, or does his own passion so transport him as to leave him unconscious of all check? Wretched, wretched man! He only pours out more cruel, stinging words. Stop in time!

Run quick! for your life! and fetch in Æscula-

pius!—two, three of them, if possible! Prodigious shuffling of feet on the stairs, wise laying of heads together, which ends in shaking of heads. It is to be feared it will not do. Any thing epicordiac is so ticklish. That cruel knife was now up to the hilt; and when it was drawn out, as it was of old from the fighting Grecian, the life came away with it. Poor, gentle, suffering woman!

* * * * *

But Nemesis shall pursue him! A little frantic grief for decency-sake, and then a hot despatch is winged away to those Paris salons. Now he is free, it says—free as air! He will fly across the seas presently to join her whom he hath always coveted. To which comes the coldest answer, positively flouting him. She has no concern with him or his affairs. Cruel husbands make cruel friends. Let him take heed that he trouble her not.

So he shall go forth on the world—outcast, and with the raven now at his heart.

During the progress of this singular narrative a fat, rather florid-looking person had been put in by the guard, all the second-class accommodation being disposed of. First-class passengers some way always feel aggrieved at this proceeding, and we accordingly looked sourly on the intruder. He, however, smiled on every one in turn, accompanying that token of approbation with brisk rubbing of his hands, and, at the close, addressed this remark to no one in particular: "And where, now, might the lady have been

buried?" No one giving him this information; he went on to say, it was indecent that hurrying over the *last offices*. Respect was always due to the remains, whatever the provocation.

We presently gathered that the new passenger was somehow connected with funerals. He was quite ready to give us one of his experiences, which would be refreshing by way of eccentric contrast.

DOWN AT RED GRANGE.

Yes, gentlemen, I am an undertaker. My name is Songster, Isaac Songster, at your service. Just ask about me at Bangalore's—they know me; or try Pawler's, or Diggins and Company—see what they will say of me! I have done business for Diggins and Company this twenty years back; behind king, lords, and commons—yes, and behind the Great Duke, too, when he went up to Saint Paul's. Bless you! they all come to us one day.

Well, yes, gentlemen! we do meet some queer things in our line. You should hear the watchers, of a long night, sitting round the fire—some of their yarns would astonish you. They've astonished me sometimes, and I've seen a bit of life. You see, the way of it is this. When we come into a house we find the family, as I may say, all of a heap with grieving and sorrowing; so they take no heed of us, and we come and go when we like, and no questions asked; that's the way we get to many a secret. Why, look at that business of Mrs. Craven's, down at Red Grange—which I saw

myself with my own eyes—why, that was as queer a bit of history as you'd ask to see in print.

Thank you, I shouldn't mind—it is a thirsty night, and it's dry work talking. You'd like to hear about Mrs. Craven? Very well,—it's not a long story either. Here's to you, gentlemen!

Let me see. I should say it was about fifteen year ago—though a year one way or the other isn't much matter. I was with Pawler then—I did not go to Diggins and Company till the year after—and I recollect, one evening about November, a message came down to the yard that Songster was wanted in the office. I went up at once, and found every thing in a stir, for a great order had come in—a heavy case at an old hall far off in the country—a family-vault business, as we would say.

“You will get all your staff together,” Pawler said, “and have every thing decent and comfortable; I have liberal instructions, so we must do it handsomely, Songster—handsomely, mind you.”

We had hard work all that day, cutting up the linen and getting things ready; we were to start that night, and we found the time short enough. About six o'clock that evening, when every thing was packed, and Pawler was giving me his last instructions (he was coming down himself later), a young man came running into the office—a fine handsome young man, but with a face as white as one of our linen scarfs. He was very wild and staggering, so that, at first, I thought he was disordered with drink; but I soon saw from the black band on his hat that he must

be a relation, a mourner, or a chief-mourner, most likely.

"Am I in time?" says the young man, running up to Pawler.

Pawler started up.

"Good gracious, Mr. Craven! is that you? I thought you were in France."

"Am I in time?" says the young man, very fiercely. "Answer me!"

"Plenty," says Pawler; "they don't go this hour. Sit down, sir, for God's sake!"

"Thank heaven!" says Mr. Craven; "I have come night and day for this. Listen to me, Pawler. I can depend on you."

"I hope so, sir," says Pawler; "I have done business with your father and your grandfather before him, and they were always satisfied with me."

"I know that," says he; "but what I want done is this. I can't go down to the Grange till to-morrow night. I must stay here. I daren't go; but I lay it on you in the most solemn manner to see that the funeral does not go forward till I come."

"Certainly not, sir," says Pawler; "it would be most improper—out of all rule."

"Ah! but you don't know; promise me, whatever they—any one—may say, my poor father shall not go to his grave without my seeing him. But what good is my telling you this? They will have their own way. I can't be there!"

"Sir," says Pawler, "I hope I know my duty; I

have your authority, and no man shall get the better of me in this. Make your mind easy, sir."

The young man did not say any more, but covered up his face with his hands, and shortly after went away in great trouble. We started not long after, by the night train—a good many of us, too. I took all my staff with me, as Pawler said, besides some extra hands, for it was to be done handsomely, and no expense spared. We had a pleasant little party going down; for, look you, sir, a professional can't keep on a sad face every day of his life—it's enough to look downcast on his duty, or when he's Walking—that's what I think. Well, we got to Red Grange early next morning—one of your ancient, open-house, have-what-you-like sort of place. Why, when I saw the straggling buildings, and the gables, and the roomy porch, and the long avenue with its three rows of lime-trees, why, I could figure for myself, as plain as if I was looking at them, the big family vault, and the family ancestors in marble, at the church hard by, and the tenants riding up on their stout cobs. These things may be known with half an eye, as one may say. We got in as quietly as we could into the house—of course keeping out of the way of company—for you know, sir, families have, some of 'em, a dislike to meeting us on the stairs. There's no accounting for these things. As soon as was decent, I sent up a message, asking to see whoever was head of the establishment, as is only usual. I sent the staff into the kitchen, and went myself to the butler's room, to learn the geographies of the place. I could have made a picture of him, too, as

I went along the gallery. A most respectable man this will be, I said to myself—with a short throat and a husky voice, with some of the old port in his cheeks, and more in the pantry cupboard. I know them well; they are all off the same joint. Well, he was, as I knew he would be, a most respectable man, and showed me how things lay in very few minutes. There was up-stairs only Mrs. Craven, second wife of Welbore Craven, Esquire, deceased; and Major Craven, his brother, who managed every thing now.

"The major was here very often," says the butler, fetching down the port (I knew he would); "very often—oftener when poor Mr. Welbore Craven was up in London. He was very friendly, the major," said the butler, looking hard at me.

"Ah!" I said, looking at him; "I see. Here during the illness, I'll swear!"

"That he was—the poor man died blessing him!"

"She's young and handsome, I'll warrant?" said I; I never saw her, sir; but I knew she was young and handsome; I did, indeed, sir!

"You may say that," says the butler; "but there's the bell for you."

So I went up at once to the drawing-room.

The Major was there, sitting at the table—a tall dark man, with a moustache, and a little stoop in the chest—a very gentlemanly-looking man he was; and his voice was as soft as a woman's. The room was rather gloomy, as the lower shutters were closed; and, as well as I could make out, he seemed to be writing at the table. He said:

"You are the person sent down by Mr. Pawler?"

"Yes, sir," said I, "at your service."

"I have sent for you to beg that every thing may be in readiness for having the funeral to-morrow. This is Mrs. Craven's wish, for whom I am acting."

"Impossible, sir," I said; "it can't be."

"Did you quite understand me?" he said, very politely.

"I did, sir," I said; "my hearing is as good as most people's. But what I say is this, and no disrespect to you, that the interment of the late Welbore Craven, Esquire, cannot take place to-morrow. You see my chief won't be down, and half the things are to come as yet."

This wasn't quite the truth, for we might have done it at an hour's notice; but I had my orders.

"If that be so," says the Major, biting his nails hard, "there's no help for it—a day sooner or later can't make much difference. But what shall I say to her?" (This was to himself.) "Look you, sir, it must be done to-morrow morning. Mrs. Craven wishes it so, and she's mistress here."

"It's no use, sir," I said; "I can't do impossibilities."

"Go down-stairs," he said, stamping his foot.

"I'm sure, sir, Mr. Pawler when he comes will—"

"I think I asked you to go down-stairs?" he said, in his polite way, which somehow took me very much aback.

Well, I left him there, and we shortly after went up-stairs to put things in order there. There was

a sort of a large ante-room outside, where the late Welbore Craven, Esquire, was lying,—all over black oak, and as dark a room as ever I sat in. It was all full of queer cupboards, and crannies, and pigeon-holes, stuck up and down and every where. I never saw such a built thing—never. I settled myself there at once, and sent the others down to the kitchen to cheer their spirits. When I had drawn a chair to the fire, and stirred up the coals with my foot, I can assure you I felt very comfortable. I felt more comfortable when there were some “things” brought in and set on the table. I sat that way for some hours, until it got quite dark outside—it might be then about six o’clock. I was thinking over what kind of a man the late Welbore Craven, Esquire, was, when the door was opened, and the Major came in with a haughty-looking lady on his arm, all in black.

“I have been consulting with Mrs. Craven,” he said, “about this matter, and we are both agreed that the funeral must go on to-morrow.”

“Sir,” I answered, “I can say no more than what I have said already. I showed you to-day that it was utterly impossible.”

“Mr. Songster,” said the lady, with a soft, gentle voice—how she picked up my name, I can’t say—“Mr. Songster, since you see we are so much interested in this matter, I am sure you will make every exertion for us. Do try, and we shall be so grateful to you.”

“What can I do?” I said, at my wits’ end from their persecution; “I am not hindering the business; but, as I told the Major, there is nothing ready.”

"Never mind that, Mr. Songster," says she; "you will contrive some plan. Do, please, and we shall never forget it to you."

I saw she was trying to come round me—pale lady with soft voice—so I said bluffly :

"It's no use talking : you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear—it never was, and it never will be done : take my advice, and wait, and do it decently, and don't shame the family before the neighbours."

I heard the Major whispering to her that there was sense in what I said, and that they had better wait ; but she turned round on him with such a wicked look—ah ! The late Welbore Craven, Esquire, must have had a weary life of it with her !

"Will you let yourself be put off with this fellow's poor excuses ? What is he at ? Make him speak. I won't be trifled with ! I tell you," she said, turning on me, her eyes like burning coals, "I tell you it shall go on to-morrow. I say it !"

I am used to be spoken civilly to, and the word fellow stuck in my throat, so I stood up to her at once :

"Madam, so long as I do my duty by my principal, I shall take no heed of bad words from any lady breathing. He has his instructions from another, as I have mine from him ; that other being young Mr. Craven, who has every right to speak here, and to direct here."

I had kept this shot for the last, in case I should be driven to the wall. It told well. You never saw people so shut up in your life.

"He is in France," said the Major.

"No, sir, he is not. I saw him last night myself."

He was trying to keep up Mrs. Craven, who was quite scared and wandering.

"Let us go, let us go," she said. "I knew it would be this way. I knew it would. It is at hand—just at hand—I knew it."

The Major looked quite mystified : indeed, all along I saw he could not make out what she would be at. However, they went out without saying a word more ; and I was very glad to be left in peace.

Well, after that I went about a little—looking at every thing, just to stretch my limbs—always, however, having an eye to the late Welbore Craven, Esquire, pursuant to orders. I thought it best to look to this myself—especially when I saw they were so determined—and I did not know what might come next : so, about eight o'clock, I made all snug for the night ; pulling in a big chair before the fire, and settling myself down comfortably.

I remember sitting that way some two hours or so, and I amused myself making out the life of the late Welbore Craven, Esquire, in the coals. I found his face there,—a quiet, gentle face, no doubt, with a high forehead and a mild eye. Bless you, I knew how that face looked at proud Mrs. Welbore, as well as if I had lived an age in the house. I'll swear he was proud of her, and loved her, maybe, to the day of his death. It's a queer thing, that making out faces in the fire !

I found myself thirsty by this time, and began to think very hard how I should get at some drink, if it was only plain water. My friend the butler was asleep

in bed, and had most likely put his port to bed too. I had no chance in that quarter; and was giving myself up for the night to the torments of a dry throat, when I suddenly thought of the traps and pigeon-holes round the room. I was soon on a chair, rummaging right and left; and I think you never came across such queer little places in your life. Such little hall-doors, and doors inside them again, and drawers and catches, you never saw. Such a sight of bottles, too, inside; but none of the sort I wanted. There were plenty of long-necked Frenchmen — champagne and the like — all empty though. There were bottles of olive-oil, and fish-sauce, and medicine; but if I was in the Sandy Desert, I could not bring myself to moisten my clay with olive-oil or fish-sauce. So I rummaged on, just for the curiosity of the thing.

I was dragging a long time at what looked like a press-door, more out of obstinacy than any thing else, when the bottom came out in my hand, and, strange enough, a little pigeon-hole opened a mile away over my head—just near the ceiling. Here was a start! I set chairs upon each other, and climbed up. I found no end of little drawers all round—in rows, just like a medicine-chest. In some there were locks of hair tied with gold thread, and letters done up with blue ribbons—love-scribbles, you may be sure; but in the last one of all, just at the bottom, I came upon a pretty-sized flat bottle, with a long glass stopper.

When you are alone that way, with nothing to do, you get a great wish to know the ins and outs of every thing. I brought down the flat bottle to the light, and

found it was all over gilding, and very handsomely cut,—meant, I suppose, for those perfumed waters ladies like. I've a fancy myself for these scented things; so I got the stopper out, and began smelling it. But of all the queer scents in this world, you never met one like that. I declare it turned me sick all of a moment. Well, sir, I sat down again before the fire, and began to speculate, as my way is, upon the perfume-bottle, just, as I said, for something to do. It's not cordial, nor strong waters; suppose it be physic? There can be no harm in trying, I thought, and laid just one drop on my tongue. It didn't taste bad at first, only sourish; but, after a minute or so, it gave me a sort of a shooting feel in the back of the neck, and down along the back-bone, just like the stinging of nettles. It went away in a few minutes; but, while it lasted, it was the strangest feeling I ever felt! "You're not wholesome," I said, as I laid down the gilt bottle, "not wholesome at all." It was an odd thing, you'll admit. And why was it hid away among the love-letters?

Just then, I thought of the pigeon-hole; which it wouldn't do to leave open. It would look as if I had been spying about. So I got upon the chairs again to shut it. But it wouldn't shut, sir, not a bit of it. The fact was, the little door had gone clean back into the wall, out of hand altogether; and if I had tried for a month I couldn't have got at it. When I saw that, I came down again, and went over to my chair. I knew, in the confusion, it would never be noticed—at least not until I was out of the house. So I turned round to

the fire, and felt very much inclined for a doze; for, you see, we had come all the night before without sleeping, and I was very tired. I was going off lightly, when I heard the door open behind me, and I saw Mrs. Craven coming in with a lamp in her hand. I never got such a start. She looked so like a ghost, with her long white arms, and her pale face, and her fine hair all down on her back. She reminded me of one of those stage-women that come on in the play, stepping on their toes, and going to murder their own fathers or husbands.

"I want to speak to you," says she in a husky kind of voice. "You said to-day you saw Mr. Craven. Tell me about that. What did he say? Is he coming here? Speak—be quick."

"Yes, madam," I said, "I saw Mr. Craven in town, and he said that he would be here to-morrow night."

She twisted up her white fingers together at this. I heard her speaking to herself: "I knew it, I knew it. They would destroy me if they could! Look here," she said, still clutching her long delicate fingers. "It must be done before he comes. Do aid me in this; you only can save me."

"Save you!" I said. What did she mean? I don't know what it was, but I declare to you, it all flashed upon me at once. I saw the whole thing in a minute, and all her odd ways since I entered the house came to look quite natural, quite natural. I felt a kind of rage against her rising in me; and, by way of defying her, I just turned round and looked up at the open pigeon-hole.

Her black eyes followed mine like a flash of lightning.

"Ah!" she cried, with a dreadful scream, "you have been spying on me! You shall suffer for it. But you are all in a league to destroy me. Give me that back, I say! Give it up, give it up!"

"Give up what?" I said.

"The bottle you have stolen! Give it me quick! A vile plot to crush a poor woman. Give it up, or I will kill you!"

She made a rush at me, but I stepped quickly round behind the table.

"Ha, ha," said I, "that won't do; it's all safe here,"—touching my coat-pocket.

"Give it me, give it me!" she kept shrieking over and over again; and then she tore her hair, and beat on the table with her unfortunate fingers, as if she would break it through. I suppose she stayed there near an hour, raging round the room, and going over the same thing, "Give it me!" At last she went away.

I never passed such a time as that, before or since. I never shall forget what I went through with that terrible woman. All that night she was coming in and out, begging and imploring of me to save her. She came back,—well I suppose twenty times. Once she went down on her knees to me, and I was very near giving way to her, for she was a fine creature, and it went against me to see her on the ground there breaking her heart. Another time she brought in a box of her diamonds, and wanted to force them into my hands

but I always thought of the late Welbore Craven, Esquire, lying in the next room, and that helped me to withstand all her tears and her diamonds and her gold,—for she brought that out, too, in plenty. Besides, I had a sort of pride in not letting myself be got over by that wicked woman.

Well, the daylight began to break at last, and then she went away for good, raging and cursing, as it seemed to me. I knew she would not come back again because of the light, and the servants beginning to be about. So I gathered myself up in the chair—being pierced through with the cold—and stayed that way till morning.

When it was broad day, I found myself with the cold ashes before me, and felt very wretched and uncomfortable; for, you see, this was the second night I had gone without any sleep. Just as I was thinking of going down to get something to warm me up, the Major came in, as white as a sheet, with two red spots under his eyes, and stooping more than ever. I knew what he came for; but I was not going to be got over by him. He tried to reason with me, as he called it; his white gentlemanlike hands shaking and trembling all the time. He said it was a dreadful thing to bring shame into an ancient family like this. It had given him a great shock, he said, and had come upon him like a thunderbolt; and I must say, I have always thought the poor gentleman had nothing to do with the business. I really pitied him having to do with that woman. But I told him plainly that when young Mr. Craven arrived, he should hear every thing; but

until he came I could and should do nothing. So he went away as he came.

Ten minutes after I heard a sound of wheels on the gravel; and, running over to the window, saw a chaise all covered with dust coming hard up the avenue. I suspected who was inside, and ran down to the door to meet them. Young Mr. Craven jumped out first, then came Pawler, and after him a quiet-looking gentleman in black.

"Mrs. Craven here?" says the young man, going past me.

"We're here sooner than you thought, Songster," says Pawler, nodding to me.

We all went up-stairs together, and the gentleman in black (who was a London doctor) went with Mr. Craven straight to the room of the late Welbore Craven, Esquire. They said he was a great professor from the hospitals, and could find out how people came by their deaths. So I knew well what they were about in that room. I staid outside, having no fancy for such things, and looked out of the window at the fine park and the great limes. Bless me, if I didn't see a figure in black stealing along behind the trees! I knew her at the first look, and I turned round to call out for some one; but I thought the poor wretch would have troubles enough of her own without my bringing more on her. So I looked out of the window again, to see what she would do next. When she got to the top of the hill, beyond the limes, I saw her stop and wait a little: presently a man came out cautiously, and joined her; then they both disappeared behind the trees.

About an hour after, they came out of the room, Mr. Craven very wild and excited, and the others talking with him and trying to keep him quiet. Where was she? Where was she? he said. Let him have but vengeance, that was all he wanted. But the quiet gentleman from London took him aside into a corner, and spoke to him a long time very coolly and soberly, and gradually Mr. Craven became steadier, and listened to him; and, as I made it out, they agreed that as she was gone, it was best to let her go her own way, and have done with her.

It was all carefully hushed up; and though there was some talk among the neighbours, no one, I believe, ever got to hear how it really happened. I heard, a long time after, that she died somewhere in France.

Well, gentlemen, *that* was a queer thing to happen to a man in the way of his business, wasn't it?

It had come to him now, he supposed, Cheerful Horn said; though, God bless his soul, in that particular of story-telling he was about as destitute as a certain knife-grinder in indigent circumstances we had all heard of. He was just thinking, at that moment, of a modest little entertainment—in fact, a sort of show-dinner, once given under pressure,—he would confess it, under domestic pressure. So, if a plain narrative of an every-day transaction—a leaf from his family purgatory—would come acceptably, why, here it was for us.

THE BRITISH LION IN A WEAK ASPECT.

I WANT to be heard upon a grievance ; I want to enter loud, out-speaking protest, as Mr. Carlyle puts it, against a monstrous mill-stone, which I am forced to bear about my neck. My soul revolts against the burden, and I must speak.

That personal pronoun is respectfully put to stand for the British Lion collectively, and the mill-stone, carried by the noble brute, is as a type and figure of the whole dining-out nuisance, the saddle-of-mutton nuisance, and the choking-cravat nuisance. I am sick of the whole system ; I want to see it abolished. Let me then be the British Lion, for a short span merely, while I state the grievance of the noble quadruped.

To begin. I am a father-o'-family lion, a duly-assessed, rate-paying, and eminently respectable lion ; a lion that has been sidesman and churchwarden in his day ; a lion with high neckcloth and deep breeches' pockets, and bearing in front something that is fair and round, and with fat capon lined ; a lion that goes every day into the city ; a lion that grumbles, but still pays. This is my picture. I am this British king of beasts ; and, of course, have a fine, portly lioness at home, to keep house for me, and rule the roast, as it is pleasantly termed. If the partner of my joys limited herself strictly to this culinary dominion, I should have no just cause of complaint ; but she interprets this popular turn of expression in a much wider sense. I am inclined to believe that the generic word ' roast ' in-

cludes my person; not mine only, but every living thing under the roof. Which brings me to the fact that there are young lionesses too,—ripe, playful things, full of bouncing spirits, and excellent at making the old lion pay handsomely,—through the nose perhaps, as they irreverently have it. With sorrow must I admit it, that these young creatures with their parent are more than enough for the aged sire. Though that inoffensive person is in the habit—on emerging from his study late at night—of discovering his hall blocked up with great ghostly cases, obviously holding costly articles for female wear; though he is frequently brushed past in broad day-light on his own staircase by persons of singularly gentlemanlike bearing and courteous address (whom he knows by instinct to be attached to the establishment of Messrs. Flounce and Company); still has he trained himself to a certain reticence and wise forbearance of indiscreet questioning. He knows that at the proper seasons these gentlemanly persons will wait upon him with their written statements, and kindly enter into all details that he may require. But away with disguise and circumlocution! The plain, unvarnished truth is, that I may not call a strongly-marked feature of the human countenance my own. I have not the fee, so to speak, of that prominent organ.

But the mill-stone! Ah! I must come to the mill-stone at once.

It was of a bright summer morning, and the Lion had come down in unusual spirits to his snowy table-cloth, his good fire, his happy hearth, and his *Times* newspaper. Someway, he was in unusually good spirits,

and through the progress of the meal is given to much unmeaning jocosity, and wit of small point and flavour. Unsuspecting Lion, however, does not perceive that from those present there comes an amount of adhesion almost unnatural. The young creatures entered into their sire's drolleries with a strange and unwonted appreciation. He was thinking of the late Mr. Luttrell and other comic after-dinner men, and is not sure whether there be not, after all, that funny vein upon his property, lying unworked all this while. Perhaps he had best set about sinking a shaft at once. Who knows, but—Of a sudden the Lioness, who has been clattering the cups noisily, addresses one of her young with: "Is Monday an open night, dear?"

"Party, hey?—Sweethearts, hey?" the British Lion says, cheerfully, still thinking of that funny shaft he was to open presently.

"We have been accepting hospitality—much hospitality—at the hands of our good friends and neighbours," the Lioness proceeds to say; "nothing could be kinder, I must say that."

Here the faintest glimmering in the world of what this grateful frame of mind portends begins to strike on the British Lion, who sits in his chair with his mouth open waiting for more.

"It is time to think of returning these civilities," the Lioness continues, hurrying to the point. "Monday would be an excellent day, and we could have in Soufflet the man-cook, and Bowles, who waited at Lord Oldcastle's, you know, and only fourteen, including ourselves."

The British Lion sees it all now, only too clearly. He is crushed for that day and for many days to come. He will sink no funny shaft upon his property this time. He is, as it were, stricken of a heap.

The Lioness has it all by rote, and can run it off upon her fingers with a strange glibness. No such marvel in that: taking into account that, for days back, the various points have been discussed and nicely weighed in upper chambers at early morn and dewy eve; as well as at that mysterious hour of confidence when hair falls down upon shoulders, and what has been tightened all day long is set free, and concentric steel hoops collapse for the night like Chinese lanterns.

At such unrestrained hours had the young Lionesses arranged all things, mapping out the whole dinner-chart—so to speak—drawing up gastronomic bill of particulars to be set before their ill-omened sire. Who was to be bidden to the feast—who excluded—who were to be mated in prandial wedlock, that is, who was to be given to the Lion sire—(point fought out with much fierce contention)—in what order was the procession to move downward. All these grave matters had been settled with extraordinary exactitude before introduction of the Bill. The passing of the measure through the House was, indeed, but an idle sham—a poor deceit to save appearances.

The Lionesses had it all their own way. It was read a third time, and passed through committee, triumphantly, that very morning. Faint gurgling from the throat of the British Lion, being the only resemblance of an opposition. Poor king of beasts! Let him

think, with feeble smile, of the Briton's rosary,—an Englishman's house is his castle! Unfeeling, mocking saw! To be amended without an hour's delay. His castle; indeed; who has not so much as the fee simple of one most prominent feature of the human countenance!

Let him, then, bow down his head decently, and receive the fatal stroke, for his hour is come. So farewell jocosity, farewell pleasant quips and cranks, for a week at least!

But this is turning of the British Lion into a pure hunk—wanton blackening of the noble beast, who, as the world well knows, is of an open-handed, lavish, and hospitable temperament; always glad to see his friends reflected in his mahogany. Far be it from me so to asperse him. But though he loves such music as “Jones, my boy, glass of wine; another cut of mutton, Jones, my boy;” and though he is overjoyed to see “Jones, my boy,” snugly, as it were, of a Sunday and holiday; still, I can speak for the British Lion that he shrinks appalled from the cold feasts and stately pomps of the formal party—from the cruel violation of the holiest sanctuaries—even that of master's study, and from the utter unhinging of all things, human and divine, in the establishment. There is carnival in the house for the time being. There is a free Jacobinism abroad; and the Rights of Man (women mostly) are rampant. The lawful proprietor is addressed in free and familiar language, and, for the nonce, becomes plain Citizen Lion. Against such monstrous principles he altogether protests.

Taking it now that the Lion has his mill-stone about his neck, and properly secured behind, I will suppose an interval of five days to have elapsed, and the curtain to be rising slowly upon the second act of the piece. The scene represents a room in the baron's castle,—no other, indeed, than the baron's own room,—but utterly wrecked. What a change within a few hours! No longer trim and ship-shape, with papers tied up orderly, and books ranged regimentally—with desk and toilet apparatus, hat-brushes, and file of boots, all symmetrical and in their proper places. All gone now, of that eventful Monday morning of the feast! The Septembrists have burst in and done their work. They have gutted the place. The desk has been forced to shut by persons ignorant of its peculiar principle, and has its hinges wrenched off. The boots have been thrown out, and will be hereafter gradually recovered one by one. The papers, crumpled and crunched into wisps, will be never heard of again. Terrible ruin! Unfeeling wreckers! who have taken cruel advantage of the few minutes the Lion has been out.

It is, indeed, the morning of the Festival. When the Lion re-enters, he will, in all probability, have the door opened to him by a gentleman hitherto not in his employment,—a person in a sort of morning deshabelle, cleanly apron, and shirt-sleeves. This is Bowles, the distinguished waiter, whom my Lord Oldcastle takes on when he sees company. His manners, therefore, have that ease and aplomb to be attained by moving in upper circles. It is to be feared he will ignore the British Lion for that festival—overlooking him utterly,

with well-bred indifference—the Lioness is the person through whom he would desire all suggestions to come.

There is a hamper unloading at the top of the kitchen-stairs. Strange men are busy taking out champagne and claret glasses, and ranging them in files. They are littering the whole place with straw. It is not unlikely that these articles are merely on hire, and will be taken away after the festival. Not unlikely, either, that the gentleman who will arrive later in a cab, with green-baize bags containing articles of plate—an *épergne* and *plateau*, to wit—may have been good enough to permit the usufruct merely of his goods. His cab will, in all human probability, come privily on the morrow, under cover of darkness, and take them home.

The Lioness has extraordinary energy and powers of mind. She is now in the kitchen, now in the parlour, now every where. She has interviews with the head of the waiting interest, and with the distinguished artist who will superintend the preparations. M. Soufflet has graduated in Paris, and has good-naturedly consented to take an interest in the occasion.

The British Lion, who has been hanging about doors and passages in a forlorn sort of way, hears the distinguished artist stating what he will require, in a haughty, imperative tone. It was the late F. M. Duke of Wellington demanding supplies of the Junta. Plenty of what is known as suet; plenty of flavouring compounds; plenty of excellent wine. This last absolutely necessary, and it might be taken to be the basis

of all things. Furious raging fire, above all. He would take possession, M. Soufflet said, on parting, at one o'clock precisely, arriving at that hour with all his tools and implements. Poor artist! He is known below profanely as Mr. Soup Plate.

Mr. Bowles is engaged in what he calls dressing the table—a work of extraordinary nicety, and requiring much exactness of eye. He is long, very long, in fixing the position of the *épergne*—backing to the sideboard, coming in and out of the room, to judge of the effect. Wonderful, too, are the shapes he evokes from napkins—the same as at Oldcastle on state-days—beautiful indeed is the work of his hands. It were best, perhaps, not to speak to him during this brain-work; he will want all his faculties. His two subordinates—Long and Wells they are called—will arrive by and by; men of experience certainly, but devoid of that finish which high life alone can give.

At one o'clock, M. Soufflet has arrived with his armoury of pans and kitchen-gear. Already is there a steam and savour through the house. Soup is being generated below. Already is there a fire raging, fit for smelting of iron-ore. Every thing has been done as ordained by the artist. It is unfortunate that the ordinary cook of the establishment should choose the occasion for being excited, justly indignant, to use her own form of words, at a stranger being hoisted in upon her, and so does not enter into the matter with heartiness.

Another interval of a few hours, and all things are

in readiness. The Lion and his family are in the drawing-room waiting the first knock nervously. The Lioness is gorgeous in pure raiment, giving out effulgence like a crimson sunset. There is a young Lioness in white, and a young Lioness in pink. The Lion himself is standing on his own hearth-rug in shining garments, but in a depressed frame of mind. He feels he has a terrible night before him; great purgatory to pass through. He has been in conflict, too, with the Lioness, and is aggrieved by reason of certain strong language applied to him during the forenoon.

Bowles, the Corinthian waiter, now in full uniform, shows himself at the door fitfully, being troubled in his mind concerning those last finishing touches, which, as he truly remarked, give a "hair" to a party. It is long, very long, before he can please himself, coming back to add a touch here and a touch there, until all is perfect. He could have wished a little more tone and colouring, he said; but on the whole it would do. He was pleased to add, by way of general remark, that there was nothing in Natur more beautiful than a table laid out symmetrically, and with hart. At precisely twenty minutes past seven he came to report that all things were ready, and every one at his post.

When the first shot came—the first knock at the street-door, that is, delivered with a terrible violence—all hearts in the drawing-room beat nervously. In her agitation, the Lioness addressed the Lion on the subject of the weather—not knowing very well what she was saying.

Now come sounds as of approaching footsteps, and the Corinthian waiter stands upon the threshold, giving out in sonorous accents "Mr. Thompson!" (Where note, that at my Lord Oldcastle's, and such places, it is customary to lay stress on the first syllable only—thus the gentleman announced became Mr. Thompse!!)

This gentleman was from the neighbourhood, asked without disguise, at about fifty-five minutes past the eleventh hour, as *bouche-trou*, or stop-gap, but who rejoiced to come on any terms.

More announcing—more undue stress on first syllables—company flocking in, in a drove.

Mr. and Mrs. BANGLES! the Misses BANGLES!! Mr. HOBLUSH! Captain and Miss STARKIE!! Lull for a few minutes, while barometrical observations are interchanged in low and nervous tones. Great people the Bangles—the Bangles of Tiffin Villas—once in the East India line—now retired. Needless to say, they were the great people of the entertainment. Bangles was liverless; but his words dropped wisdom. Mrs. Bangles, too, was—. More desperate cannon-ading, more influx. "Mr. and Mrs. MARJORAM!!" behind whom entered softly, and without announcement, Jones, my boy.

Decent interval for further interchange of more barometrical notes: and the Corinthian waiter appears abruptly with tidings that the Lioness is served, which is the signal for uprising, general rustle, and cruel bewilderment. The old Lion has had instructions to take the men aside, and appoint each to his companion; but has lost his head, and has mated wrong

parties: which being all set straight by the prompt energy of the Lioness, the procession defiles slowly down.

The dinner was laid out after what Mr. Bowles styled "the Rooshian system," presenting a pleasing prospect of dried fruits and candied preparations. The baked meats that do so coldly furnish forth tables, were kept studiously out of view, according to the Muscovite practice. Bangles looks with unconcealed disgust at the whole thing. The Misses Bangles are not inclined to be so severe. One has been paired with the Reverend Alfred Hoblush, Curate of Saint Stylites, a young person of tender thought and delicate susceptibilities, and looks on the "Rooshian" programme with favour. Her sister, too, who has been joined with Captain Starkie (Royal Allonby Fusiliers), was so absorbed, that it was found afterwards that she had not so much as noted the peculiar feature of the entertainment.

But Jones, my boy, who had been invited specially to give a sort of sprightliness to the feast, was proved to be a miserable failure: his jokes, being damp, went off lamely. There was a low familiarity about the man, the Lioness was heard to say afterwards, that made her blood boil. In truth his humour jarred painfully on the Indian nerves of Mr. Bangles. There was a rude boisterousness in his quips, which made that Nabob shrink away, as from an easterly wind.

Meantime the dinner made progress slowly: with a dismal stateliness suggestive of a funeral feast. It

might indeed have been such a melancholy occasion, with the funeral games to succeed immediately. There was a sadness in Mr. Bowles's demeanour quite in keeping; and a mournful cut about his raiment. The stiff silver side-dishes associated themselves with coffin decoration, and the screen behind the Reverend Alfred Hoblush might have stood for a tremendous headstone. It went forward slowly and sadly, that Muscovite dinner; now halting, now moving on spasmodically, chilling all hearts. Now it would be suspended indefinitely, beyond all hope, attendant mutes passing in and out uneasily. An unforeseen casualty had taken place below, gelatinous confectionary having collapsed suddenly, and become a mere pool. Sounds of unseemly wrangling would be heard outside, attendants striving with fierce contention who should bear in the head dish. So it went forward through many weary hours, with long dead pauses and unnatural silences, as though the public outside were perpetually walking over the guests' graves, silence only broken by waiters' monachal chant of "Hocksherry claretmadeira!" whispered confidentially. So the Russian feast staggered on ruefully, until it came to the time for the ladies to pass away; and the whole burden is thrown upon the poor British Lion: he has been aground long since, having drained himself utterly for Mrs. Bangles; so he can but draw in his chair nervously, and keep passing the wine eternally, until he become a pure unabated nuisance, and positively drive his guests to the drawing-room. There the weary join with the weary again, and hold halting

converse together. The men wander about gloomily, and look absently at stereoscopic views. The funeral coffee is presently brought in. At last Mrs. Bangles rises, and goes her way with her family. Then does it all become a pure rout, an utter *saute qui peut*. No one can be gone fast enough.

How long, I ask again, is this to be endured? How long, I say, is life to be made a burden to wretched fathers-o'-families by reason of this monstrous system? As a British Lion, and speaking for brother lions, I say again and again, it is a nuisance, a monster nuisance! Rouse yourselves, my brethren, and devise a remedy! Revive even the old Roman system. Give each invited a mappa or napkin, and let him take away with him a portion of the baked meats, or such as he may fancy: but let him not consume it on the premises. The Roman, the Greek, the Hindoo,—any system but the present. The pot of rice upon the floor, common to all fingers, a more cheerful repast. Let us agitate, agitate!

During the concluding portion of this narrative the monastic traveller had grown exceedingly restless, and consulted his yellow breviary with much nervousness. He was murmuring something about a station—a junction—place where five minutes is allowed here for refreshment. Let him see; was it Bletchington Moor? N-o-o; we were not due there until 1.13. It was—ah, yes—Hamber Close. No. It was Dangley-Bustard. No. It was a roll of other stopping places, and it was not; until, at last, public opinion

interfered, and pronounced it decisively to be Bingley Junction; and Bingley Junction it proved to be.

But not as yet.

All through the long and weary darkness the night mail had been speeding forward, scouring over broad counties. All through the long and weary night the dull lamp overhead cast down its sickly light on the travellers sitting opposite to each other, burrowed in their rugs, and coiled up in all manner of strange attitudes. All through the long and weary darkness the night mail kept flying forward, swooping through stations—past smelting works, where lurid fires were bursting from the ground, and where witch-figures seemed dancing; past large and dusky towns; past other night-trains swooping by; and past tall chimneys and illuminated factories, like monster glass-houses lit up festively.

With sensible slackening of pace, and lifting up of heads to let down the glass, and look forth on the chilly night outside; with slow threading of our way among whole teams of huge, shadowy, iron dray-horses, lost in clouds of their own damp vapour, and led away to stable; with flashes of lighthouse reflectors poured into us suddenly, and gone the next instant; with large emerald-green bull's-eyes winking on us as we pass; with shadowy figures perched high on the top of poles, like the poor posturers of the circus, and producing, by mysterious agency, uneasy jolts underneath us, as we had fallen into an iron rut; with dark, unemployed carriages gliding by; with more lamps gliding by,—we are rolling into great white halls of effulgence—into the abode of the fairies, and the realms of bliss!

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We are gliding slowly, slowly past transparent cloisters, lit up, with the dove-eyed nuns standing behind counters, and high, steaming urns, and heaps of general refreshment; past offices now closed, with shutters up, as in hopeless bankruptcy; past solitary luggage lying in expectant loneliness on the platform; and past long files of porter-monks chanting out nasally their peculiar antiphon,—change ye all here for interminable bead-roll of strange names.

Doors fly wide open, and human figures step down. Rugs are put back languidly, and dozers, emergent, stretch forward, and, blinking, would know where they are. A jostling, tramping population is cast loose upon the platform. Arctic voyagers stand in orderly rows within the glass cloisters, and importune the dove-eyed nuns for teas and smoking drinks. By a glaring clock, much heated and bleared with late hours, we read off the time as five minutes to one. Bells are clanging out discordantly that it is time to have done with Bingley Junction, and bring out perfect gushes of Arctic element, flying scared from the glass cloisters, with unfinished morsels of food in their hands, and driving wildly at carriage-doors not their own. The porter-monks are chanting again; the dropping musketry-fire runs down the whole line; and, finally, with a scream and subterraneous rumbling, and additional impediments beneath, we are discharged once more into Erebus.

I find that the monastic traveller has passed away in the interval, and that a new canon has been inducted in his stall. A quiet, thoughtful face, of a calm white-

ness, which no flush seemed ever likely to colour; a tongue that moved seldom, but a face that spoke much. The business man, too, had gone into the past, with his *Economist*; and to the vacant stall had been presented a very cold, clear, and distinct clergyman, who, not being acclimatised by residence, bore in with him from the outer air a certain rawness and dampness. On him Cheerful Horn, being recognised dignitary or diacanal spokesman of the party, turned full his instrument, and hailed him with a blast of welcome.

"We have been telling stories all night long," said he, "positively the whole night long, like a set of huge children at grandmamma's knee. But on this night leave and license is given for such little fooleries. So, sir, if you have any thing to tell—any little parish chronicle—or even, shall I say, parish scandal—it will be very welcome, very welcome indeed!"

The cold, clear clergyman coughed dryly, and first made excuses. A sermon, indeed, he might compass on such short notice; but a story! Wait, though! and presently he recollected an incident which occurred in a little town where he held a minor canonry. Clearing his throat periodically in a husky, unsatisfactory way, which affected the throats of his hearers, he told his story in nearly the following language.

OUT OF TUNE.

FOR such as love peeping at society, stereoscopically, or fancy exceedingly small interiors in the Dutch man-

ner, where the area is limited and the figures few, the little cathedral-town of Ivysbury will furnish excellent entertainment. So small indeed, in its whole extent, that it might be said to hang by the cathedral, and stand or fall, according to the alternative that edifice was inclined to choose. Therefore, he who should be so patient as to keep his eye fixed continuously to the glass, would be certain to see many curious and diverting things—there was such an infinite variety of slides.

Ivysbury is not one of our struggling, overgrowing, corpulent towns, which has long since overflowed its natural edge and built itself out away into the fields: where the old cathedral is by way of accident only; where it could be done without conveniently (saving vested rights); where there are profane factories and incongruous mills; and where, in short, no one has time to think of a daily service, and the choristers' voices reverberate with fine effect up and down the empty aisles. But this Ivysbury was the closest, compactest thing of the kind that could be conceived. It was a pocket edition of a cathedral-town, which its excellent bishop might cover with his broad hand, or shelter under his fine shovel-hat, or put away out of sight somewhere in the region of his great episcopal flaps. Humble intellects have been known to construct from memory a complete plan of the place, which was indeed but an open square with a few lanes radiating from it, that had the property of taking the traveller back with unerring certainty to the open square again. Low houses, narrow lanes, delightful green doors with

brass knockers, like the travelling shows, and wooden palings. This was the sort of loose impression to be taken away by travellers so often deluded back to the open square. Ivysbury was behind the time; running to seed, said the smart men of contiguous towns. The smart men were very likely right.

Perhaps, to take up this finely-coloured slide, exhibiting the interior of our cathedral on Sunday morning at first service, with all the inhabitants gathered thickly, and filling stalls and pews regimentally, with the precentor and minor canons doing their chanting, and the organist in the gallery labouring as at a great engine, with solemn ecclesiastical dignitaries in their little carved boxes sleeping devotionally (praying, that is) on pillows huge as themselves, with the great ecclesiastic of all, the dean, in a little carved box by himself,—perhaps this would most conveniently bring together in one view the personages of our town.

When taken over it of a week-day, by the old verger in the skull-cap, your eye does not travel very high as you stand, with neck well back and hat behind you, pivoting on your heels. The roof seems to start from the ground, much after the old-established principle of card-houses. Every thing is very thick, very much bulged, and out of shape. The great old window at the end lights every thing; for the smaller windows down the sides are so short and squeezed, that they almost go for nothing. Rough beams protrude every where, disguised in whitewash.

Please to take notice of the stalls where the minor canons and singing gentry recline. The carving by a

pupil of Grinling Gibbons. There is a woodpecker busy, with natural instinct "tapping a hollow beech-tree" right over the Lord Bishop's stall, conjectured to be from that master's own hand. It is certainly of his period.

All individual singing canons have smaller woodpeckers and smaller beech-trees, worked into the extinguishers over their heads. That bird is my lord's family crest. It was my lord's ancestor that had the carving done. His present lordship, it was said, was likely to have them restored and repaired; which, to say the truth, they want sadly, the extinguishers being mostly warped all awry over the canons' heads. Yonder was my lord's own pew.

The tombs? Ay, the tombs: we must see the tombs. This way, then, to the sort of Indian temple, to Vishnoo or Bramah maybe, running up the wall all in stages, with curiously painted gods. This, sir, is the Beagles' mausoleum, erected by John, second Earl of Beagles (better known as Fighting John), circa sixteen hundred and eight, to the memory of Mary Janet, his wife. The noble Mary Janet, in a tarnished yellow ruff and brick-red cloak, kneels on a cushion facing Fighting John on another cushion, also in tarnished robe. These are two excellent idols.

On the second stage are four little Josses in tarnished raiment, all praying away lustily with their little hands up. Kinsmen of the House over them again, up and down at corners, and in uncomfortable positions. The woodpecker always ingeniously introduced as apex.

More tombs. Small, short counters in by-places, of a slate-colour, cold complexion. Sleeping pairs done out of the snowiest marble, reposing together placidly on their marble counters.

The slabs in the pavement once had inscriptions; all remotely connected with the noble family who held the Manor. The sums sunk (literally) in these mortuary reminders, may have had some effect in creating those straits in which the present noble head of the House was reported to be labouring. The crypt, with some curious bones and a general damp flavour, was to be shown, too, for a small extra fee; but we will not mind that to-day, thank you.

Here, then, is that diamond edition of a cathedral in a diamond edition of a town, and here on this fresh Sunday morning, when there is invigorating combination of frost and sun abroad, is our congregation gathered thickly as bees, to hear that morning service, when the new dean, Doctor Dilly, would show himself, for the first time, to his flock. Here, then, are the minor canons and vicars ranged chorally, like great white poultry, along their oaken roosting-place; each with his woodpecker extinguisher awry over his head, like caps set crookedly on inebriated men. Beautifully indeed they chant, with eyes turned heavenwards. The tenor especially, who should be written down Mr. Seraphim for his angelic and melodious notes. Ecstatic light passes in flashes from his face, as he pours his voice from mouth ever opened wide. The youth has light hair flowing back, and a forehead white and broad, as a tenor should have. Wonder, too, how from the

huge, corpulent being, full of flesh and unctuous juices, should proceed that unnatural tone, so womanish, so rich and fatty, being no other than Glueboys, the chief counter-tenor. Conjecture, too, what prodigious thoracic muscle must have those able-bodied men who work their organs with such rasping, gritty edge, that you would take them for so many small saw-mills. They are Burden, Silvertop, and Boldman by name. Tough fellows, that struggle hard with the fine mellow organ tones that came rolling in billows up the church and down again, drifting onwards; the seraphic tenor and counter-tenor swallowing them up, or bearing them to the surface harmoniously. That organ right over the porch—in a gray rookery of its own, where the organist sits—came from the hands of Dutch Silbermann, a contemporary of the second Earl of Beagles.

Melodious instrument! with pipes of gold and silver, and every sweet-resounding metal. How many Eastern gongs were melted into them it would be hard now to say; but such ripened and mellow tones went gushing from them when the organist laid his fingers to the keys, no man who had not heard could scarcely conceive. That silver-pipe vegetation went upwards in bunches, twisted together and interlaced in wild luxuriance, to be lost overhead in the ancient wood-work. It was tall Indian trees in a thick jungle, only with long silver stems, and old oak palm-leaves up above. It was the huge poop and lantern of old ships of Spanish build, floating castles—a similitude borne out to perfection when our organist, warming to his work, made the keys clatter; and there was heard from

within flapping, breaking sounds, as of ship's bloeks and cordage in a storm, with strange heavings, and swellings, and whistlings of winds. It was fine to see how he rode that musical whirlwind. With eyes kindling, with fingers dancing a fierce giga upon the keys; feet stamping furiously upon the pedals, as working eternal treadles; hands clutching savagely at stop-handles, to the right or to the left, with his whole soul and faculties directing the rushing torrent; the tall, ill-shapen, stooped organist does his work bravely. Presently, there comes a lull; then, turning in his rookery, and leaning on his elbow weary, he looks down from afar at the white-robed canons, Seraphim Glueboys, Burden, Silvertop, and Boldman, chanting away divinely, and dwindling down as small as they chant. He sees, too, from afar, the new dean sitting in his roost, and presently thinks—as all the parish thinks—what a pity an honest local divine—Maydew, he was called—had been passed over. Nay, he knows it had been promised to the honest local divine, who was strangely popular; but, as was well known, my Lord Beagles had stepped in; and, being great with the bishop, had it given to a particular friend of his own. Full of charity and good works was this honest local divine, and the good souls of the town had paid him congratulatory visits. Mrs. Blushington—worthy woman—whose gaudy bonnet any one else in the rookery must have noted, had already marked him down for one of her offspring; and Mrs. Doctor Pipples had loose notions of the same sort. Uninterested parties, loving the man for his simple worth, said it was a

cruel thing; and our long lank organist (who had the weight of many good years on him besides) felt his thin cheeks warming, and a sort of indignation at his heart, as he thought of his poor disappointed friend. He knew well how many burdens were on the small stipend the cathedral furnished to him: an aged mother; sisters unprovided for. Had it only not been promised and given (the parish calling clamorously for such appointment), it had not been so bitter; but——

But here, the responses being now done, the Seraphim and brethren far away below are borne down and swept away in the great stream that comes pouring from the rookery. It is the Anthem, *For the Lord is a Great God*, which is lifted up on the voices of the Seraphim and his companions, is quavered by the strained throats of tenor-men, in small defiance at great Dutch Silbermann in the rookery, biding his time; but who presently comes tramping down upon them all, flooding them over, drowning them with his deep pedal burr, thundering in bass utterance that the Lord is a Great God; making all the roosts and oaken seats quiver with the deep tremor. This dies off again, and leaves our tall thin organ-captain to turn round on his elbow once more, and think what a puffed, pompous, worldly-souled cleric the new dean looks, swelling in his great egg-shaped sleeves, gazing with metropolitan contempt on the provincials about him. That is poor disappointed Maydew, who has now the trial on him of chanting prayers to his fortunate superior opposite, which he does in a low, gentle voice. The new dean

hearkens with curiosity ; he knows of the man, his expectations and failure ; knows, too, of the peculiar feelings of the people towards him, and does not love him too much. But his puffed metropolitan cheeks let no such secret escape. Though, when our poor divine stumbles and goes near to breaking down at the close, something very like a sour smile comes upon the metropolitan cheeks : which even he who is afar off in the rookery cannot help noticing, and feels fire of anger within him. But here Silbermann must be let loose again, and roll his swelling, tumbling flood down the aisles, to the minor canons, to Seraphim and his brethren. Once more, For the Lord is Great, led off in high quavering by Seraphim and holy company, to be overborne again in the great stalking, stately, rumbling torrent that shall burst from the rookery. For the Lord is a Great God : sinking, swelling, bourdon, trumpet, great organ, every silver pipe, large and small, braying out that text. A lull once more : Silbermann is quiet again, and organist, turning in his rookery, hears, far below, faint voice accents. Some one is preaching.

He does not, perhaps, know (being of all men in the parish the most retiring and incurious of news) that there has been present all the service, listening critically to his music, a pert, smug creature of his own profession. This Mr. Wilmer Smythe, R.A.M., who is so pert and smug on his metropolitan connexion, has come down under the cassock of the new dean. As he had taught in some families of distinction, General Whitlow's, K.C.B., Lord Rufus Penguin's, and others, Lord Rufus had resolved to put him in as organist of his own

cathedral. The holy man's puffed cheeks distended even more as he was told, on arrival, there was one filling the office already with even higher qualification than mere competency,—a superior artist, who could not be dismissed without public clamour. "Let these agriculturists croak themselves hoarse," the good dean answered. "Lord Rufus has my promise, and out this music fellow shall go. He is too old for the work." Old he certainly was, running close to sixty, being lame besides; and yet none more famous at working fine old Silbermann. When any new practitioner should get the handling of that noble Dutchman, unskilled in his constitution, it would be an ill day for the parish and the cathedral. No one knew so well his pulse's fibres, and most delicate nerves, and what things were best for the keeping of him in good health. Old Silbermann was as his child; and not so tender, perhaps, could he have been to his own offspring. Nevertheless, out he must go, the Dean said; until persons of weight (and distinction also) came to him and said the thing could not be done safely. The agriculturists, always bull-headed, would not stand it.

Well, at all events, the dean told Wilmer Smythe, R.A.M., he might as well stay, as there was no knowing how matters might go. Lord Rufus had county friends not far off, and among these he might make a fair connexion. As good as hinted besides, that as soon as he could conveniently have the present organist on the hip—well, no matter for the present. So, with curled lip and sneer scarcely repressed, the pert and smug man hearkened to old Silbermann under his

enemy's fingers. That lip-curl was to be translated, Old-fashioned! Roccoco! Behind the age. Silbermann was effete and wheezy. Better a bran-new fellow,—hoarse, strident, shrill. Well, when it came to his turn, they should see.

So, the sermon being now done and all else concluded, and the glorious army of white-robed canons having defiled in procession across the aisles to where they shall ungracefully drag those garments over their heads, our organist is now busy playing the congregation out. Rustling silks, of the gayest colours, and most splendid provincial finery, stream out below him, while the great choral tempest is rioting again, blowing a hurricane among the Silbermann poles and cordage, making its timbers groan and creak, and the porch below quiver. So are they played out, and gather outside about the old iron-worked gate, waiting for country equipages to drive up. They see, too, the new dean taken up into the august company of my Lord Rufus Penguin, who shall set him down at his deanery-house, perhaps go in and have a glass of wine. The sun, now very strong and cheerful, makes the frost into bright spangles, sending home all cheerful—all saving our organist, who has played the last man and woman out, and is locking up Silbermann, and who is still ruminating upon the ill-luck of a dear, dear friend, which dear comrade is at that moment slinking home—a mean term for a hero of dignity, but still the fittest for that gait of his—slinking home, then, to his little canon's tenement by the most private road. Luckless Maydew! eating his very heart out for grief and mortification, to

say nothing of what ills he saw impending. He did not too much love the new broad-cheeked dignitary, or pray too heartily for his prosperity; nay, had some feeling in him of antagonistic and even bitter kind. For, as we all know, it is not because a man has the bishop's stamp upon him, that he gets thereby a warranted-sound and virtuous nature. Unhappily, he is of the same foolish earth as his unclerical brethren, which will turn red-hot and grow calcined under strong heat. So was it with Reverend Maydew, and he renders reason of it to our organist, who has followed him down to the little green-doored tenement for consolation purposes. It is full time now to tell that this limping organist's name was Twingles; tall and ungainly organ-grinder as ever was, with bad, sunken chest, the longest ivory fingers—suited excellently for his trade—and the gentlest heart inside of that bad chest. And so he comes restlessly on his consolation errand, and hears his friend give him reason.

“I cannot bear to think of it,” says the Reverend Maydew, distractedly. “It is next to utter ruin, for I have not told you all.”

Then to his long pale counsellor he proceeds to tell all. That is to say, how this aged parent of his, residing at a distance with her long race of daughters, had grown jubilant and exuberant upon the promised promotion, had on the strength of it—nay, upon his encouragement—taken up certain moneys at interest, and sent them out lavishly for clearance of debts and general largess. Poor souls! the bare revocal of the promotion was surely a sufficient blow, without that

cruel revocal of the moneys, now next to impossible. The pinched canonry funds, with all squeezing in the world, barely sufficed to keep those souls decently upon earth; and how was it to be now with them? Thus he told his story, to one who was about a poorer church-mouse than himself, and the two condoled together piteously. Organist Twingles shuffled up and down on his limping leg, with most woe-begone countenance, his wan cheeks flattening inwards painfully, as he feels that he has no comfort to offer beyond a few pounds put by and his own dismal sympathy. So best to leave them in the little parlour, which they nearly filled up between them—the most wretched pair, perhaps, in the town.

Meantime our new Dean went his way ecclesiastically with prodigious disfavour, to the hearty tune of murmurs and grumbings but ill-suppressed. For he held fast by that original notion of his, that here was a nest of the purest unmitigated rustics, unredeemed provincials; he had gotten somehow amongst them, and the only thing for him to do was not to soil his own feathers. This word, by the way, is all the more fitting, since irreverent folks, almost the first day they had seen him walk processionally, had dubbed him *The Magpie*. This was a horrible profanity, yet it was irresistibly suggested by his puffed, inflated figure, and the way his black hood fell behind. It was known that he had laid for himself a rule to keep such fry, not at arm's length, but at three times that measure—otherwise you would never know how much they would encroach. Let them croak and grumble over their dull

plebeian tea-cups; he did not fancy them at all. There were certainly some respectable county families, whom he was glad to know, such as Lord Rufus Penguin's, General Whitlow's, K.C.B., to say nothing of the Honourable Mr. Bolster's. In such society, he could well dispense with Mrs. Blushington and her daughters, who gave the best ecclesiastical drums in the place; with Doctor Brown, F.R.C.S.L.; with the collector, or representative of the treasury in that district, a person of terrible importance, and whose dinners were the desired of all, lay and clerical. At the undisguised disfavour of such he could afford to smile sourly; and went the road he had chosen, the most exalted, high-blown, self-opiniated, and most unpopular of deans.

Wilmer Smythe, R.A.M., meantime was also choosing his road under shelter of the magpie skirts of his patron. Was the Honourable Mrs. Bolster disinclined to have her three daughters broken in to music under the same hand that had trained Lady Mary up in a metropolis? Was Mrs. General Whitlow averse to his teaching who directed the fingers of so august a being as Lady Louisa Badger's niece? Were the great county families to turn coldly from the man who held credentials from such quality? who had breathed the same air with such quality? whose fingers had rested on pianos of quality? Was it in human nature, in flesh and blood, to be insensible to such considerations?

And so Wilmer Smythe, R.A.M., was sought and bid for eagerly by the county families. Poor limping Twingles and his sound musicianship was written down as exploded, and was elbowed quietly aside. Up to

that date, he had had the county families, and was accepted for want of better, to their surprising improvement. Now, his day was voted as gone by, and, one by one, they let him drop. Poor Twingles! he, too, had obscure relations in far-off regions, whom he kept. The smug practitioner was almost overworked, and had a little book which he searched distractedly for a spare half-hour or hour when asked out: "Utterly impossible, my dear sir! I am full for the next fortnight! 'M—'m— Let me see. I think at three on Friday week—ye-e-e-s" (then decidedly, and closing the book) —"impossible! that is Miss Bolster's hour."

The county families said it was a shame so capable a man had not the organ. So Lord Rufus said to the Dean over and over again. But Doctor Dilly only said, placidly: "We must wait, my lord; we must wait a little; the thing will right itself presently." Which it certainly did in a very unlooked-for manner.

Unhappy Maydew all this while had been fighting desperately through difficulties; and with infinite pains and trials had raised some money, and so staved off ruin for a short span. Through which sorrows he had fretted himself into a sort of low fever, and was lying tossing in his wretched little canon's room, with a dim sickly light burning on the table near him, when his friend Twingles, with hopeless face, came in to him on a commiserating visit. He had been writing letters—long feeble scrawls, and the bed was covered over with fair and spoiled copies. By the light of the dim candle, he spoke excitedly to his friend of Doctor Dilly's conduct. He had written to him a statement of his diffi-

culties, and by what cruel misapprehension—connected a little with Doctor Dilly himself—they had been brought on him. A cold, unfeeling answer from the puffed-up dignitary: purse-proud, over-fed, bloated (these were Maydew's fever epithets) man—fit minister of the Church!

"But," says the excited clerk, lifting himself, "I have been writing to him again, in another fashion. He shall know what I and all here think of him."

Organist Twingles listened with awe and terror.

"Beware what you do! Oh, take care, dear friend!"

Just as he was leaving the room, after sitting till the sickly candle had all but wasted away, Maydew called him, and asked him to direct for him those two letters, as his eyes were grown feeble. "Don't let it be in your own hand," he added; "take care of that." So our simple music-man did as he was bid, and wrote, not in his own or any body else's hand, a direction to Reverend Doctor Dilly.

It might have been about a week after that day, when Canon Maydew had somehow pulled through his light fever, and was gone for a few days (perhaps on a money quest), that a rumour got abroad in the town that Doctor Dilly, the Great Dean and Magnus Apollo ecclesiastical, had received certain letters of anonymous character: letters that spoke plainly, and told him the mind of the whole parish concerning him. Presently there came to be no need for mystery or rumour, or any thing savouring of uncertainty; for Doctor Dilly, with colour in his swelled cheek, and

fuming tempestuously, was seen passing and repassing the little square all day long, and was heard to proclaim, with a trumpet-tongue, that he would drag to light the infamous author of those unsigned letters. Such diaconal indignation could not well be conceived; and indeed Lord R. Penguin and the Honourable Mrs. Bolster joined in agreeing that it was a monstrous affront. Mrs. Blushington, Doctor Brown, and others of that stamp, who had had the line drawn between them and diaconal dining, were in singular glee, and hoped he might receive a bushel of them. As to the canons, lay and cleric, they were all, as it were, bound hand and foot, and dragged into the presence of Doctor Dilly, to be fiercely put to the question; but without profit.

"It is that mean, cringing fellow, Maydew," said Doctor Dilly, without disguise; and he did not dissolve his Star-Chamber.

The whole parish atmosphere hurtled with speculation, clatter, scandal, and untiring gossip. How would the thing end? Whose was the guilty hand? Doctor Dilly fumed to no purpose, and was likely to continue so fuming, only for a sudden *deus ex machinâ*, or theatrical god, which came to help him, in the shape of smug Wilmer Smythe, R.A.M., who, prying cursorily over the letter and its direction, burst out, as inspired with sudden *afflatus*:

"I know the writing! That fellow Twingles has done it!" and, fetching from his pocket another envelope, placed the two together. One was disguised, beyond a doubt: but still there was the same twirl

and flourish peeping out. It was unhappy Twingles who had directed it, beyond all question. No one had dreamt of that limping, inoffensive, retiring person.

"Send over to his house," Doctor Dilly said, visibly swelling. (Lord R. Penguin, with other noble inquisitors, was present.)

Wilmer Smythe, R.A.M., walked to the window, to hide his smirks of satisfaction.

Presently, Organist Twingles came shuffling humbly in, and shrank away from the awful countenances of the inquisitors. He felt nervous before this terrible gathering, and his shrunk white cheeks grew more white and shrunk.

"Did you write this letter, sir?" said Doctor Dilly, in tones that made the prisoner's heart feel cold.

With trembling fingers he took it, and tried to read it. "No, sir," he answered, "I did not."

"He dares to deny it," said the Grand Inquisitor, looking round.

"Never wrote it, sir," Twingles answered, gathering courage, "and let Heaven be my witness!"

"Matchless effrontery!" murmured the Dean, shaken a good deal, nevertheless.

"Show him the envelope," whispered Familiar Smythe, R.A.M.

"Look at that, sir," says Doctor Dilly, again, sternly.

Twingles looked at it, and started. "That's like my writing," he said, doubtfully. "Oh, I recollect."

"Ha! ha!" says Dean and Familiar together.

"Indeed, sir," says poor Twingles, almost crouching, "I did not write it. I only—" Then it all flashed upon him—his sick friend, and the bed strewn with writing.

"Well, sir?" said the Dean.

But Organist Twingles was silent—had seals upon his lips. No one word would he speak, had they their rack, oiled and new-rope, in the next room. He would not betray his broken, wretched friend; though he felt that those words would soon fit his own case.

Mr. Dean saw how things were at once; but voted him *particeps criminis* all the same. He should rue it. He had got him on the hip now, as he had said long before. Out he should go, packing. Bring forth the San Benito garment; give him over to the Familiars. Wretched, miserable ex-organist! Smug Wilmer is now in thy room. Day of jubilation for R.A.M.!

Out he shall go! From the snug little tenement (green door, ditto palings, and shining knocker, two storied, and snug as a baby house) which from time of the foundation has been shifted from organist to organist. From the little garden attached, planted, sown, and cultivated by his own hands. From the old town where he was born and bred and reared up from a chorister-boy upwards. From the rookery where he has grown to be an old man. Sunday to Sunday, years after years. From old Silbermann himself, dear old Dutch fellow—here was cracking of heart-strings, wrenching of old affections in the cruellest, deadliest way. Out he must go, said Mr. Dean.

It was a Saturday evening, an evening whereof the morning had brought him this trouble—a cold, frosty, nipping, gray-tinted evening;—of an indigo-tinted, bluish-gray complexion, that sent spirits down to lowest Fahrenheit point. There was a sombre look over the town also, it being whispered with mystery that the conspiracy had been discovered and the guilty parties punished. It was a great thing to talk of, a great gossiping god-send. The question was, who would play the evening service at three o'clock?

That would set men's minds at rest. Certainly it would. Three o'clock came, and with it the greatest gathering known for years back at a week-day's service. The pious folk felt a sudden yearning for week-day religious nutriment, and so they clustered in and filled every nook of the place. The Dean himself was present and triumphant: so was Lord R. Penguin, who, with a noble relation of his, was to dine that evening with Mr. Dean. The auspicious exploding of this new gunpowder-plot should be decently celebrated. But who was to play? Any who might be loitering near the bottom of the church might have heard feeble, tottering footsteps shuffling up the narrow stairs leading to the rookery. Such as looked back would have seen the poor bent figure, grown older by ten years since the morning, dragging itself with difficulty to the feet of old Silbermann. The smug R.A.M. was not so ready (nor fitted, perhaps) to undertake the handling of him at an instant's warning; was shy and nervous, and himself asked of the ejected organist to play for one service more. "For the last time," said

Twingles, with a choking in his throat, "certainly, for the last time." And so tottered on to his bench, drew out his stops, and rubbed together his long thin fingers before laying them on the keys. Many eyes from below wandered furtively to the gnarled clusters of silver Silbermann; the great antique decorated poop and lantern being between them and the player. But who shall be the player?

Finally it comes. Such a rich tumultuous sweep of sound from every golden throat of melodious Silbermann: such sweet, full luxuriance: such overflow of harmony, going home to hearts of the most unmusical there present: such dying falls: such stirring ascensions: such low wails of sound: Silbermann, with all his olden fame, would scarcely be credited capable of. Every bit of ancient oak, the dark marble counters lying in corners, John, second Earl of Beagles, noble Janet his wife, acrobatic kinsmen and children perched up and down on uncomfortable points and corners—even the august cap and tassal of our stony Dean set up on edge before him—all were felt to vibrate musically to the strange pedal thrum of old Dutch Silbermann. Were there pipes lurking secretly within him, never till this hour thought of? So he played on—played them through it all—until it came to playing of them out—for the last time. He was grand, prodigious, magnificent, the new organist! Though our sympathies are with the poor evicted one, still must it be conceded that Smythe, R.A.M., was a giant among the stops and pedals. So the men and women of the little town thought in their heart of hearts, as they trooped

down to the porch—being played out—their eyes wandering speculatively to the gallery, where behind his Spanish poop there was a hurricane blowing, and ship's timbers creaking, and our poor Twingles, possessed as by some sweet musical devil, was riding the storm. So he played them out, for the last time, until the last soul was clear of the porch. Then brought all up with a full swelling chord: and to him Silbermann was to be now silent for ever. Oh, the sore straining and long distending of those heart-strings, as he moved away, only to be drawn back again to the shadow of loved Silbermann. Such violent agonising stretching for poor old ex-organist! Would he ever be set free, save by sudden snap and rupture of the ligaments? Had there been any prying souls left in the church—but it was only the little cherubs' heads, so queerly cut out of stone, on the tops of the great pillars, and whom nothing escapes, that saw him do it—they must have observed him return softly when he had locked old Silbermann up for ever, and press his lips fervently on the keyhole. Then he fled away, and was gone, with all scanty goods, by the night coach.

When it had got wind that, after all, it was not smug Smythe, with his Roman letters, who had so handled great Silbermann, but poor, expelled Twingles, there was much sensation. The noble person joined in ties of consanguinity to my lord, and who was what is called a distinguished amateur, swore, with a noble oath, that it was a shame to turn out a fellow like that. By something! if he were dean and chapter and the

rest of them, he would double the man's salary and set him up there for good. Everlasting punishment on — (word of four letters only) — these country-town little squabbles. Why, up in London, they would see, — the man would get his own price — everlasting punishment on himself if he couldn't. To which Doctor Dilly very doubtfully said, "Only wait till they heard the new organist, that was all." And they might as well, for he was to begin to-morrow. So back again to the little cathedral.

Sunday in the cathedral. Dean, minor canonry, vicars-choral — distinguished persons — and smart audience as before. Second Baron Beagles and the noble Janet his wife, with their noble progeny; heirs male of the body, lawfully begotten, perched, pigeonwise, on the sharp edges and corners as before. Great Silbermann as before, in aspect, that is. Organist not as before. No, indeed.

So they begin. Seraphic cherubim of lay-choristers bend to their work. Dean swells egg-like. And now, indeed, for Smythe, R.A.M., greatest organist and accomplished artist! Extinguish for ever the memory of Twingles, if you can. Wretched fellow, his sorry heart is all twittering and fluttering, and pit-pat! To say the truth, he has never had much acquaintance with organ-work; the Roman letters will not teach him that. He is nervous, and Silbermann seems to eye him askance, like a horse that has changed masters, and means mischief. Now, then, young Smythe — to it, my musical man! Seraphic chanting is stopped — bellows are full. Begin with vigour and spirit.

O wretched quavering! most feeble tootle! No courageous attack; no fiery manipulation; no divine afflatus; nothing but a smooth, even, contemptible fingering. The pedals are too much for him; the full-stops he is afraid of. Old Silbermann must be laughing contemptuously at him. It is a fiasco—a complete fiasco, and Dr. Dilly hangs his head for shame. Smythe, R.A.M., is great, doubtless, on Belgravian and Tyburnian pianos running liquid rain-showers, and froth of the sea, and cascades (he having indeed published many secret little pieces for young ladies bearing those names); but for grand Silbermann and his fellows, he is the smallest pigmy. Some say he has broken down; others that he shuffled through, somehow; but the noble person, Lord Rufus's relation, oaths it that he is a pure botch! which, of course, is final on the matter.

But while this opinion is being ratified over Doctor Dilly's claret, at about eight o'clock that Sunday night (and it was a very, very cold night, too), some shuffling sounds of footsteps are heard upon the stairs. The Dean's own bodyman, a very proper person, is struggling with some intruder, and objects naturally to the sacred privacy of the claret being broken in upon. It shall be—must be—broken in upon if it was the king himself, and a ghastly white face, plainly but lately lifted from a sick pillow, bursts in. The noble persons present are, naturally enough, appalled. Doctor Dilly thinks it a spectre. It was not a spectre, however, but the Reverend Mr. Maydew. How he told his story, to the effect that he, lying ill, for some days back, had rushed from his bed—travelling express—to repair

wrong and injustice, as soon as the story of this innocent organist reached him, will perhaps have been divined readily enough, by such as have followed this little chronicle.

To say the truth, our Dean was a little ashamed, and not disinclined to do justice. And when the noble kinsman, with a thump on the table, swore that it was a fine thing as ever he had seen; and that, as far as he was concerned, they should have the old organ-grinder back by next post, he was glad enough to yield handsomely, nay, even passed over Maydew's share in the business. Even Deans have good corners in their hearts. And so our good Twingles did really return, making a sort of triumphal reëntry, and sat again in the rookery, where he has sat ever since, as Sundays and festivals come round; and where, on last New-Year's morning, he played out the old congregation, on the ripened, mellow, and most harmonious pipes of his dear Dutch organ.

We were drawing to the end. Nearly all the calendars had told their stories. Some one—I think one of the shooting men—volunteered a little personal history of his own, just to keep the thing going. We might laugh at him if we pleased, for he *did* own to having been sold a little on the occasion. Before he began, however, would any one like a cigar? Nearly every body did; and, after a fresh and comfortable re-settling in the stalls, the shooting man began.

THE FLEUR DE LYS.

I.

HE that is of the road will, assuredly, follow the road when he can. The shoulders that have once borne the knapsack, will not be easy until its straps have been fitted on. This unerring law, I may take it, set me once more a-tramping it on those French roads, set me, I say, again a-tramping it on the roads; not without a faint hope that I might fall in with something like adventure, or at least see more of the ways of men and women than could be gathered from the windows of a conveyance.

It was just about the end of a fine autumn evening, that I found myself mounting the hill which leads to the pretty watering-place of Petiteseaux. It may as well bear that name as any other; and so Petiteseaux it shall be. Charming, most inviting spot it appeared to be; for that approach was directly under a rich green wall, which stretched up far above my head: being, indeed, the straight side of a high mountain, handsomely furnished with this rich green planting. Out of which becoming background, could be seen peeping out, far a-head, the white buildings which made up the little cantonment known as Petiteseaux. "It will take me," I said to myself, "a good twenty minutes more before I can unbuckle, and take my ease in my caravanserai. By the way, what caravanserai?" And with that I took out a pocket-book in which my friend Wilbraham had written down with his own hand

the name of what he said was the sweetest, freshest, and cosiest inn the heart of travelling man could require. Watched over by a most bewitching landlady, who was herself a picture to look at. The name of the inn was the Fleur de Lys, and that of its mistress Madame de Croquette, both set down carefully in the pocket-book. "I was here," said my friend, "but for two days; and heartily sorry was I to quit. It is likely enough that I shall join you there." On that I put up the pocket-book, and pursued my road under shelter of the green wall. There were little winding walks up its sides, leading to a pavilion or summer-house, perched high enough; and which one, fresh and unwearied, might have found entertainment in pursuing. "I will sit in that pavilion," I said to myself, "some of these fine summer evenings, when I shall have grown to be of the place. 'Twill be very cool and refreshing after the day's work, whatever that shall be. Drinking the springs of Petiteseaux, perhaps?"

At last, here it was. Not more, I suppose, than forty or fifty two-storied, white, shining houses. Clearly a very grand, fashionable drinking-town some day. When our grandchildren should be grown up, there will be marble fountains and steps, a gorgeous redoute, conversations-house, and salons de jeu, with light click-click of roulette-wheels as music. Healthier music, too, from the Grand Orchestra, of thirty performers, under the eminent Herr Spongel, playing morning, noon, and night, in their elegant open-air temple, while the noble visitors drink. All which are

to be clearly foreseen in the future. This innocence of aspect, this pastoral effect, will have passed off against that time. There will be the hot glare of countless gas-lights, lighting up white-moustachioed faces of industry-chevaliers and faded aristocrats. Who knows but this low building, hidden almost with green flowering plants—and which I see is the Fleur de Lys inn—may hereafter be swept clean away, or burst into a dazzling, staring, sumptuous, and exorbitant Hotel of the Four Seasons, or Imperial Crown, or, perhaps, of England? Who knows?

No one seems to be abroad in the little town. No one heeds me. No officious gush of the porter or waiter interest. No encumbering of a man with help, as rough Samuel Johnson put it. I entered under the porch and laid my wallet down unassisted; then sate myself down beside it.

Some one was coming down the stairs with a very light step, and singing. A chamber-wench, most likely! no.

I stood up at once, and recovered myself, as a soldier on duty. She gave a little start, and curtsied. The most charming little Frenchwoman in the world, that might have been cut out and stolen from a picture; with a little laced cap perched on the back of her head; with a neat little jacket of linen, and apron with frilled pockets,—Madame Croquette, beyond a doubt. But that cold-blooded Wilbraham to have been so slack in his praise!

Said the little woman, with a certain dignity of her own, "Monsieur is welcome to the Fleur de Lys. He

has, perhaps, travelled far, and will desire to repose himself."

"He did desire to repose himself," I answered; "but for that matter, he would ask Madame's permission to stay where he was—in her shady porch, that is—in proximity to the sweetly-smelling honeysuckles which coated Madame's house."

"Well, it was a pretty place," Madame would admit, with a little sigh, "and curious to say this was her favourite seat too." And with a delicate little kerchief, which came from one of the little pockets, she brushed from off the seat about a pinch of dust, if so much, and sat down just opposite.

"Then if Madame knew," said I, feeling that an opening for a compliment was given me, which only the dullest hind would have neglected; "then if Madame knew what a becoming frame to a charming picture it was, she would sit there all day long."

She smoothed down her apron, and said, with a smile, it was *très bien dit*.

"'Tis the truth, Ma'am," I said, bluntly, "and my friend Wilbraham is a stock and a stone!"

"Your friend Vilbram," she said; "oh, *mon Dieu!* you know him! There is another friend of his, one *Monsieur Truvloks*, who had been staying with us,—a good-hearted, well-intentioned sailor, but, *mon Dieu*, so absurd!" And thereupon Madame chattered through a whole list of folk, and all about them. In one quarter of an hour we were the best friends in the world. "Come," said she, rising, "now I will show you your apartment; the prettiest little apartment in the world."

II.

The prettiest little apartment in the world opened on the court; for there was nothing short of a court in Madame's hôtel. Nothing short, too, of a fountain in the centre, and orange-trees in square green boxes ranged regimentally about. Coming out through the glass-doors of the prettiest apartment in the world, you would see there was a gallery overhead, making a canopy and pleasant shade, with a little wooden chair for you to sit on, and smoke, and look at the fountain and orange-trees. So that he who would have quarrelled with Madame's description of her apartment, as being too boastful, must have been a hard, sour, practical churl. He might as well have tackled Mr. Sterne's Parisian wig-maker for offering the buckle to be submerged in the ocean. The sentimental clergyman thought a pail of water would have been as convenient: not so poetical, truly. I know, had he been standing before her as she said it—the sentimental clergyman—he would have agreed with her heartily, and taken her hand in his, and kept it there for Heaven only knows how long.

Dinner, Madame had said, would be towards three o'clock, in that long glass corridor, which ran down one side of the court. No more fitting place. Decidedly Petiteseaux was more advanced than it had first appeared to me, and was making fast Glorious Four Seasons era. By that dinner-time, Madame had also said, I should have opportunity of seeing her company gathered together,—the quality of which I had already

guessed; for there was a town of fair size and respectability not many leagues away; in which town, as of course, abounded gentlemen of working habits; small merchants, smaller advocates, physicians, and the like, who had not wealth enough for distant travel, and were glad to turn Petiteseaux into a small pinchbeck health-restoring watering-place. And so all the quality of the respectable town came to Petiteseaux when it could.

At dinner, then, I saw them all. Strange to say, they were of the quality I had guessed; for there was a little round black man with sharp ferret eyes, who had no need to write *avocat* after his name of Tournalou. Neither had the long grave man in black, who was called Riquet, any reason to set out on his card that he was of the Faculty of Medicine. He was out-speaking, as it were, of his profession. So, too, was it with the notary, or scribbling-man, Faquinet; and with Monsieur le Curé, whose garb spoke for him. There were half a dozen or so of merchants, or trading-men, who had not such visible marks of their calling about them; fat, twinkling-eyed fellows, to whom waters must have been of prodigious benefit. But three ladies only, of the company: Madame Tournalou, Madame Faquinet, and Madame Badine; betwixt whom raged fires of jealousy and undying animosity.

These elements, with Madame Croquette herself at the head of her own table, were gathered together in the little glass pavilion at the hour of dinner. I was set next to Madame Croquette, as stranger, and person of distinction. Needless to say, Madame's demi-toilette

was charming. No staring, or taking measure of the stranger and his points; he might have been sitting there as in his accustomed seat every day this month back. Monsieur le Curé, who sat beside me, and who, I believe, was dean, or vicar-general, or dignitary of some sort, in contiguous districts, addressed me in his smooth, placid tones, as though he had parted from me at breakfast. He was good enough to detail to me the origin and progress of the malady that had brought him to the waters, taking in Madame towards the close, who listened with extraordinary interest.

Gentle little woman! she had heard it twenty times, I could swear. "Oh ciel!" she sighed, with hand clasped, "how cruelly you must have suffered, Monsieur le Curé!"

"Mesdames and Messieurs," said the good man, with more force than appropriateness, "I can assure you that I had a fire within my veins that can only be likened to what the bon Dieu has prepared for such as do not love him. My interior was, so to speak, bouleversé!" Here the vicar looked round with an interesting aspect almost indescribable.

"O heavens," said Madame, again, with hands still clasped, and a tearful swimming look in her eyes, "how cruelly you must have suffered!"

I felt as if I could have gladly taken on me all Monsieur le Curé's peculiar sufferings to have purchased some of Madame's seductive pity.

'Twas easy enough to seize the right state of things betwixt Madame Turlou, the advocate's lady, and Madame Faquinet, notary, or writing-man's lady. It

was plain to be seen that Faquinet's position was unhappily ill-defined in the social scale; on the debatable ground between gentility recognised, and far lower walks. Turlou was of the upper tendom in the profession; nay, it might come to this, that Faquinet would have to do writing-work at Turlou's bidding, or employ. This peculiar relation naturally gave rise to an awkwardness between the ladies; who fired hostile glances at one another from opposite sides of the table. With Turlou's lady I could have no sympathy; she being a fat, blowzed, arrogant creature, that would stand upon her position, whatever that might be. Now Madame Faquinet was a round, smart little person, who, I had strong notion, must have begun life as a grisette, or, perhaps, as small milliner. I was glad to see she made little account of her blowzed enemy opposite: amusing herself with small archery-work on one of the young traders, who sat beside her. As for Turlou and Faquinet, they were, strange to say, the best friends in the world, and talked across the table of a walk they had had together that morning.

"Mon Dieu," whispered Madame to me, "if you were to know all I go through to prevent them pulling of caps!" (she did not use this exact English idiom), "you would think they would pull my little eyes out between them! Madame Turlou," she went on, "holds herself as belonging to the cream of the cream, and turns up the nose at poor little Faquinet. In truth, my heart is altogether écrasé by their jealousies;" and here Madame drew a deep sigh that seemed to come from the bottom of her little lacerated heart.

"You Messieurs of the English nation have wisdom; such gravity, such aplomb. You can advise a poor solitary woman who has no one in the wide world to turn to."

And here Madame turned those swimming eyes of hers on me with an inexpressible melancholy. There was something very soothing in this confidential relation sprung up so suddenly between us. It was clear that she had exercised a sort of preference in my regard; choosing me out to be recipient of her little troubles. His must have been a gritty heart that could have been devoid of interest in them. The truth is, those fine Briton's qualities she had spoken of do make themselves felt. She found she could lean with more reliance on our bluff honest natures than on the minauderies and false lacquer of her own country's *petits-maitres* and *galants*. For instance, that provincial exquisite not yet mentioned, sitting at the foot of the table, and twirling his moustaches of imperial pattern (they called him Edouard Galli Mathias), would have proved but a sorry comforter.

She was alone in the world, she had said; but whence came Madame's matronly prefix? This troubled me somewhat; so I put in, delicately as I could, certain leading interrogatories bearing on Madame's social status: filing what lawyers call a bill of discovery. She was a widow, she said: had been so these two years. No mortal had ever breathed who was more deserving of general regard than defunct Croquette. He was the best of men; best of husbands; would have been best of fathers had Provi-

dence only so willed it. He now reposed himself sweetly (*doucement*) in a shady corner of Monsieur le Curé's graveyard, with the most charming headstone in the world over him. The laced handkerchief now wiped off a little tear at the corner of one of the little eyes, and the subject was changed.

"I can only say" (it was the lawyer's lady who was now speaking, in a harsh, nasal tone, that seemed to come through a comb),—"I can only say, that when I and Monsieur Turlou were residing in Paris—which we are accustomed to do for at least three weeks in each year—such a thing was undreamt of. In fact, Madame, the wife of the district procureur, who is our very intimate friend, has told me as much."

Here she looked round on the company and snorted. Madame whispered me :

"En garde! See—they cross swords! Listen, and you will be diverted!"

The husbands were indifferent, and were not out of that wood yet. But the notary's wife was not slack. She seemed to bristle over with little points.

"Bah! what can sleeping provincials know of that sweet city, who are taken up by complaisant husbands, like school-girls on a holiday? I was born there, Dieu merci! and hope to end my days there. I know every turn in the dear city."

"Like enough," said her enemy, now puffing and flaming; "no one will dispute Madame's knowledge of the streets!"

This was an awkward allusion to grisette element in the social station of the notary's lady, who well nigh

bounced from her chair. Her arms became instinctively a-kimbo, poissarde fashion; but her husband jogged her, and they dropped at once.

"Ah!" she said, in a shrill tone, "what does that speech mean? I would gladly know it, and have it made known to this company."

"Not half so fine a prospect," said the lawyer, still on the walk, "as I had seen in Languedoc."

"I will not take the trouble," retorted Madame Tourlou, still through the comb.

"Certainly," riposted the little round woman, "we should always wash our linen at home—eh! Madame?" By which was conveyed a dexterous allusion to Madame's origin, dimly associated with the laundress profession.

"I will not!" said the lady roundly, and forgetting all restraint, "I will not take such talk from any low quill-driver's wife!"

"Nor I," said Madame Faquinet, a-kimbo once more, "from any Parvenu Robin's wife—pah!"

"Mes filles! mes filles!" murmured the Curé, wiping his lips, "a little moderation, I implore of you; such little roughnesses during the season devoted to nutrition may seriously disarrange the digestive functions. Be patient, my children!"

"Yes, Monsieur le Curé," Madame Croquette said, a little fretfully, "the whole thing is not worth a straw."

On which there came truce, for that hour at least; and Monsieur le Curé gave us some pleasant reminiscences of how he first began to grow wrong inte-

riorly; of how his ailment came upon him almost like a thief in the night, and seized upon him insidiously; of what his first feelings were at the discovery—surprise mingled with consternation, hesitation, astonishment, perplexity—with other highly curious and interesting particulars. These carried us well through the dessert and after-dinner wine. The hostile ladies still glared fiercely at one another, and retired with menacing rustle from their gowns.

III.

All through that cool evening there was a bivouac all round the house: out on the green sward; under the shady trees; in the pleasant garden, and even in the court under the gallery. The ladies fetched work and bestowed themselves on little green chairs, all saving and except Toulou, who was reported to be asleep, and snoring even, up-stairs.

"She is a nightmare, a goblin, a trouble to our sweet life here," said Madame to me under the porch. "Your sober English common-sense must take her in hand."

I would do any thing, I said, to aid Madame; perhaps would have added something more pointed, but for those imperial moustaches, which, I found, had drawn near, were saying something to her very sweetly, as they fancied, and mincingly. He was cut short, however, very short. Madame had plainly no relish for such an intruder; and so, with a slow shrug, he twisted himself about on his heel, and sauntered off.

Alone I took the road through the woods spoken of

by the harmonious husbands, and thought of Madame Croquette. I leaned against a tree. She was charming—even to those little gray boots—even to the little collar, barely a single half-inch in breadth. And that little toy household of hers and the pastoral inn. Why, I continued reflectively, a man might do worse, far worse, than unstrap his wallet for good, and end his days here, shepherd-like. Sit at the head of his own table-d'hôte, and entertain his strangers. Queer destiny! Yet a man, wind-buffed and travel-sore, might cheerfully accept it, especially if there were one so charming to sweeten the toils of direction. Ah, well-a-day! When little gray boots and narrow collars find their way into a man's head, it is all up with him. As to showing fight, it is out of the question.

That Briton's sterling aplomb and sound sense spoken of so handsomely by Madame continued to make itself felt in other quarters. Its appreciation was further strengthened after a few days' stay. Out on the farm before breakfast one day, Madame Faquinet unfolded to me the whole story of her grievances at the hands of that ogresse Tournalou, getting quite fiery and excited as she proceeded.

"It must end! it must end!" she said, turning to her *poissarde's* attitude. "I will not endure her insolence. Now, I put it to you, Monsieur—was it to be borne? But I stopped her voice of *Polichinelle*."

"Madame did so most effectually," I said, concurring as of course.

"She will not offer to engage with me again," Madame continued.

"She will not," I said, "if she be wise."

"The pig!" Madame exclaimed, with strong disgust. "She should be ashamed to show to the world that huge person of hers."

Towards mid-day, I came upon Monsieur le Curé, sitting on a camp-stool under a broad tree, and reading his Breviary. The good man looked as though he would be inclined for a little pleasant digestive conversation; but I could not bring myself to break in upon his pious task, so I passed him with a profound salute.

I shall tarry here, I said, at least one month. There are a hundred ways of passing the time. Firstly and chiefly, sweet little Madame herself; who, to say the truth, has shown a wish very plainly to make her house and self as agreeable as might be to the stranger.

But traveller beware! Perhaps this charming little widow may have been of Delilah quality. She may have been familiar with drugs and unhallowed potions. How would that decease of Croquette (husband) bear looking into? Had the good man been, so to speak, Lafarged—worked off by the process known to that daring widow? I should like to hold inquest on remains of deceased Croquette, to have him exhumed, and the contents of stomach put in a jar and analysed by Professor Taylor. These fair French souls were ever dangerous. Had we not read of them in the novels? All those smiles and winning ways were but traps and pitfalls. So, stranger, I say again, beware!

The bare notion made me turn pale. I had not thought of the subject in that view before. Youth is

ever careless, and here was I on the verge of a precipice. These notions filled me with distrust and uneasiness, and I returned home rather moodily, and a little ashamed of myself. In future, caution should mark my guarded way, as the queer old song has it; designing women, as all the world has known this long time, abound in France. These said sweet dainty creatures are only so many mermaids.

So, when dinner-hour came that day, and with it yesterday's company of the Curé, lawyers, traders, lawyers' wives, and Madame herself in a suit of raiment exquisite in taste and wholly different from that of the day before (even the little boots were of another hue), I wrapped myself close in a cold and repelling demeanour; wanting nothing, certainly, in a proper respect; but being to the full as dry as any chip ever pared. I have a strong idea, on the whole, that I behaved like a brute.

"Did you not know this was my fête-day?" said Madame, beaming with smiles. "All the world has presented me with bouquets, except you, Monsieur. *Fi donc!*" she said, shaking her head, "how comes it?"

"*Pardieu!* he must have mislaid it," said Madame Tournalou, "for I saw him gathering one with my own eyes."

There was a truth in this; but it was before coming to that wise resolution in the garden.

"I have done wrong in not gathering the flowers," I said, with a cold stare. "I must ask Madame's forgiveness. As to its being Madame's fête-day, I was as yet a stranger to it—not one of Madame's intimates;"

and then—(shrug.) “Garçon! some of that Volnay I had yesterday. Mind, the same.”

The poor little woman looked wounded; but it was the first step towards establishing a proper distance between us. The first step, too, towards playing that brute character spoken of. I felt, as I sipped the Volnay, critically, how they must have all admired the sturdy Briton's aplomb, and way of putting the thing. But Madame, with the tact of her country, took me at once as I wished to be taken, and dropped that confidential manner which had so distressed me. She became landlady, and I guest. Was not that, after all, the proper footing? and, for the rest of that dinner-ceremony, I was treated with all formality. Which should have been most welcome to the Briton's heart? for it was as he desired, and yet— It was a little provoking, certainly, to hear all the jokes and private allusions which went round—outside of me—and which it was now plain had been hitherto repressed from respect to the stranger. Even the Curé became less subjective, and let off jokes. Turlou, of the comb, floundered whale-like in merriment. I looked on a little rueful; but it was better thus.

Breaking up, they whispered a good deal together, and talked in knots. “What hour?” “You will come, of course, Monsieur le Curé.” “In Madame's own room?” “Such a pleasant thing!”—these were words that reached me. Presently came the Curé to me with mysterious manner:

“Monsieur will attend, of course?”

“At what ceremony?” I asked.

"Madame's little fête," said he.

"I have heard nothing of it—received no invitation!"

"What a deplorable mistake! It is terrible, and should have been thought of!" said the good man, all in a flutter.

"Bah! Monsieur le Curé," Turlou put in, who was standing just by, "there is none needed. Madame will be overjoyed to see every one, as a matter of course."

"'Twould be more en règle," said the Curé, still troubled. "Wait; I will settle it in the twinkling of an eye."

"I beg," I said, stopping him with dignity, "I beg that you will not take any step in the matter. I should not be able to attend in any case."

But he had gone, and was speaking to Madame at the end of the room. Well, I might look in for a short time or so—a bare quarter of an hour—without damage to that dignity. One should conform to the customs of the country.

The good man was explaining the difficulty to Madame with much earnestness. Madame shrugged her shoulders and laughed:

"He is welcome to come, if he please."

"Be it so, Monsieur le Curé." Confusion.

I had an engagement which would ultimately prevent the acceptance of that kind invitation. I was engaged to—myself, for a walk—for any thing—for nothing, in fact. I was wrath at Madame's cool, French treatment; and yet was not such footing more desirable? Oh, infinitely!

It was about nine o'clock when I returned from a dull stupid walk. I went up the hill to see the famous view; but I had been up the hill many times to see the famous view before, so it had grown to be a little stale. I went down the hill, on the other side, to the little brook miniature waterfall, which was held to be about the prettiest thing in these parts. But the waterfall fell flat, and the brook was naught. From these dismal conceits suggested to me on the spot, the unhealthy tone of my mind may be gathered. Returning, then, by the back of the house, in no very contented frame of mind, I passed one of the windows opening on the ground; whence sounds of voices came. Here was the scene of festivity, and right merry they appeared. It was Madame's own little boudoir. These French folk can enjoy themselves, I said, with a sigh. Officious, prying Monsieur le Curé, who might have been reading his Breviary, had spied me. One of the waiters came flying through the glass-door to fetch me in. If Monsieur would only so far honour them! They would be so desolated if he did not. It must be so triste—so doleful for him to be wandering about in that fashion. Then came another with greater instance. And so with no decent excuse ready, and unable to fetch up even the most wretched shift, the Briton, with all his dignity, had to suffer himself to be led in half-resisting, half-complying, with more of the aspect of the British sheep than of the British lion.

The prettiest little room that could be conceived. All the gift-flowers scenting it like a garden. Such a chatter of tongues! Such enjoyment; such pleasant

faces; such courtly airs and postures, worthy of the Louis Quatorze court. Lawyers were unfrocked, and unlike lawyers. The houses of Turlou and Faquinet seemed on easy terms. Madame, from her easy-chair, said, I did her too much honour; but she would try her best to entertain the stranger. Words very frigidly spoken. Come, I said to myself, let me relax for this one night; there can be no harm in that; for this gentle little woman means only kindness.

But alack! the wise resolution was formed too late! I was among them, but not of them. Had they all too readily taken up that hint of mine let fall at dinner? These sharp-minded French folk accept such intimation readily enough. Prodigious respect came from Madame—from every body. I was, as it were, grand seigneur. Nay, it seemed as though I had brought in with me a certain chill and restraint, which, Heaven knows, I tried hard to thaw and dissipate. Many more of Madame's perfections I had to learn that night. By and by she went over to the piano and discoursed little French ballads in the most delightful fashion; patois things acted in the most perfect fashion. I had never heard any thing so pretty, I said to her in warmth of admiration. She said I was very good. I was too complaisant; did so much honour, &c. &c. Every one seemed to delight in it but that heavy exquisite with the moustache, whom I have mentioned before. Supercilious fellow! He lounged on the sofa in a lazy insouciant mood.

That night in my room—the prettiest little room in the world, be it recollected—I made a wholesome re-

solution; namely, to have a regular formal making up with Madame. There was something pleasing in the notion: perhaps tears from Madame. It is an old story that, leaning towards quarrelling for the sweet pleasure of making all things straight again.

So, that next morning—it was a fine sunny forgiving morning—I went forth to the garden, where I saw Madame out betimes trimming her flowers, and here made repentant acknowledgment of all my sins. I had furnished myself with the choicest of bouquets procured from neighbouring horticulturists, and presented them humbly as a peace-offering, which was graciously accepted. The old smiles were returning, the old winning manner was coming back.

“We are friends now,” she said, putting out her hand, “but we never were enemies.”

“Nor ever shall be,” I said.

“Who shall tell?” she said. “Mon Dieu, you looked so wickedly at me yesterday, I was quite frightened!”

“Did I?” I answered, quite aghast at my own villany. “No, it cannot have been!”

“Indeed you did.”

“’Twas not at you, then; it must have been at old Tournalou.” This was the signal for commencement of an amicable dispute, which completely restored the old harmony. I said: “By the way, I have received letters—business letters—this morning, which I fear will hurry my departure. I must think of setting out on to-morrow, or the day after.” There was no such pressing need of despatch, but I thought I would see

how she took it. Was it possible—was that a little tinge of colour creeping over her cheek?

“Mon Dieu! and must you really go?” she said at length. “What a misfortune!”

“I must, indeed,” I said, “and, believe me, with infinite regret—the happy hours I have passed in this little retreat shall never be forgotten by me; neither can I forget——”

“Oh, I am so desolated at this piece of news,” she interrupted; “I had counted on your staying with us longer. Do not go yet.”

I looked at her with a strange feeling of interest. What could she mean? “Do you really wish me to remain?” I said, taking her hand.

“My faith, yes!” she answered. “If I were to let you into a little secret, I am sure you would. Shall I tell him? Yes—no. I cannot bring my mind to it!” and she turned away her head. Was it to hide another of those tell-tale blushes?

“Dear Madame,” I said, “you must let me into this little mystery.”

“I cannot, Monsieur.”

“You must—I—I will promise you to stay if you do!” She turned round.

“Well, that makes a difference. So I must tell you my secret. You must know, then——”

Here came running from the house the soubrette or waiting-woman. Madame was wanted in the kitchen.

“You shall hear it another time,” Madame said; “perhaps not at all.”

"Cruel one," I said, reproachfully, "and your promise?"

"Well, if you must know, come to my little boudoir at breakfast-time, and perhaps—"

With that she disappeared. What could this secret be? Could it be indeed—that the wanderer had inspired with a sort of regard this gentle recluse, this charming provincial? It seemed terrible coxcombry to let such a notion even near me: and yet one might have as well shammed blindness. Why may I not admit, to myself only and in the strictest confidence, that I lean to that persuasion.

And pray why not let me ask (this I spoke to myself, pacing the garden, thoughtfully waiting for breakfast summons), are not our French sisters outspeaking in such matters; not suffering any thing in the likeness of a wormi' the bud to prey on their olive cheek? Else what the significance of that little embarrassment and those blushes? It was a great mystery, and a pleasing mystery too. Then I fell into that old speculation of how a worse destiny might surely befall one than spending the residue of his life in this pleasant retreat, far removed from the busy hum of men. Proprietor of this little territory, where none of the world's wickedness had as yet penetrated; where might be studied eternally that pastoral simplicity so characteristic of the French rural districts. Where, at the head of my own table, I might learn from passers-by how the rough world outside was progressing. Madame's charms would daily heighten: children: Antoine, Marie, Estèlle, growing up about

us: the golden age at hand, life tolling on like a dream.

"Breakfast, Monsieur!" garçon, with fluttering napkin, announces.

IV.

In the boudoir, as it was called, Madame was seated.

"I have promised to tell you my secret, and shall keep my promise."

I drew near confidently. "Will you be angry, Madame, if I tell you that I have half guessed it already?"

"Not a soul in the house knows it but yourself and another!"

"Another!" I said. "You have told it to another?"

"Ma foi, why not? Was it indiscreet?"

"H'm," I said.

"Well, then," she said, "in three words, my little secret is this, I am going to be married next week!"

I started to my feet with a bound. "Married! What do you mean?"

"'Tis intelligible," she said, laughing.

"It is monstrous!" I said, intensely mortified: "and to whom, pray?"

It was to that insolent, insufferable trading exquisite, of the pointed moustaches. He was so elegant, Madame said; such grace in his bearing, his air so distinguished. Had he not struck Monsieur in that view? Adolphe, that was the name. Dear Adolphe had indeed offered his hand. Noble person! Such qua-

lities, such powers, and he had even terres—that is to say, some sort of estates. He was altogether charmant.

A four-horse diligence went by in an hour's time. I would depart by the four-horse diligence. That business of mine had now become so pressing, it would not admit of a moment's delay, I said, packing my portmanteau violently.

As for Madame Croquette, the conclusion I came to when fairly caged in the coupée of the diligence was, that she was a thorough French——well, not to be uncharitable, that her name contained one letter too many.

Cheerful Horn, who had borne up so bravely all this long night, now, I thought, began to show signs of flagging. His notes had not their original ring and stirring freshness. But, he said, the 'Thing' should be complete. There was only that gentleman yonder, in the corner; and if he would be kind enough to make the business, as it were, square? This appeal was to the pale, thoughtful face, who nervously accepted the office thus put upon him, and in a simple, candid, heart-felt fashion told this story.

IN THE MALLE-POSTE.

It started hours later than the heavy diligence, and would arrive long before that huge conveyance. It was, besides, a smoother and more grateful mode of travelling, this by Malle-poste. As to the propriety of going forward at all that night,—it was the pro-

prietor of a certain wayside house of entertainment who was speaking,—it was not of course for him to counsel Monsieur. (Shrug.) He would merely submit (shrug) that certain infames had been heard of lately along the road,—wretches who came from behind hedges, and used travellers with small courtesy. Mon Dieu! was it not only the other day that the Great St. Omer diligence was stopped by a band of these larrons, the ill-fated voyageurs being stripped of every thing, even to their upper garments? It was not for him to speak. There was in his house cheer of the very best; every thing comfortable. On the morrow there would be ravishing weather; and if he were in Monsieur's place—

There was sound philosophy in what the good host was putting forward; and there was, besides, a snug aspect about his house, even more seducing than his arguments; to say nothing of a certain persuasive savour, as of impending bouillis and rich potages. But it fell out, unhappily, that I was at that time journeying homewards in hot haste, and could not afford to lose an hour. I must confess, too, I had but slender faith in the robber-legends, holding them as a transparent innkeeper's device for the decoying of weak and timorous souls.

When, then, did this Malle-poste come by?

It would be here in—say about half an hour; at—say six o'clock. The cuisinier would have just time to get ready the divinest little biftik or côtelette, with a garnish—say of pistachio-nut, with potato à la maître d'hôtel (ubiquitous, but ever welcome); or, indeed, any

thing else that Monsieur would please to name. As to wine, a flask of the choicest should be standing before Monsieur in rather less than a clin d'œil.

Flinty indeed must have been the heart that could have withstood mine host's wistful offer. Though I believed not in his biftiks and pistachio-garnish, no, nor in the acid watery mixture which I knew would shortly figure on the table, I felt as though I had defrauded him of his anticipated prey, and bound in honour to do something for the good of the house. So he went his way rejoicing, and soon was busy with all his household manufacturing the stranger's biftik. Such virtue as mine was not to go without its fitting reward. In course of time the biftik came up, strangely charred and sodden,—a gristly, stringy morsel; and the wine, but for its tint, an admirable substitute for table vinegar.

In about an hour's time, when I was looking ruefully at the biftik, which remained much in the same state as when it came up, I heard the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs clattering over stones outside. Running over to the window, I saw the Malle-poste coming up in good style to the door. It had grown dark by this time, but I could make out pretty well what kind of vehicle it was: a light britzka-like vehicle, with capacious hood and huge springs, with a pair of fiery, rough-coated quadrupeds attached, who bore signs of having come this last stage at a headlong pace,—this was the Malle-poste. Seated aloft, with his horses well in hand, was a smart moustached figure,—the driver of the Malle-poste,—

now busy cracking his whip and calling to the inhabitants of the inn with melodious *Ola! Ola!* He could give some account, if called on, of terrific hill-side descents, of desperate precipices barely shaved, of runaway beasts with bit between their teeth,—all, perhaps, all within the compass of that last stage. There he sat,—chanting fragments of a *Poste*-song popular among his brethren, cracking his whip en *vrai artiste*, every now and again calling fiercely and with malediction on *ces gens-là* to come forth. To him presently appeared the overworked being who performed the various duties of *garçon*, ostler, boots, *fil de chambre*, and very likely, judging by the day's performance, those of chief cook. He brought a pail of steaming compound for the horses, furnishing, besides, pleasing recreation to the driver on the box, who was skilfully directing strokes of his whip within perilous range of the attendant's person. This I noted from the window, waiting until it should please my host to bring me his little account. But looking further into the depths of that vast hood, I made out something that looked like the shadowy outlines of figures, significant of the presence of fellow-travellers. At the same moment, sounds of excited language, mingled with *sacrés* and such profane adjuration, reached my ear. I stood out upon the top of the stairs to listen. "Are we to stay here all night? What do we wait for; is not every minute precious to me? We must get forward to-night, I tell you. Ten thousand *sacrés*, yes." Host, in mortal fright, was murmuring something about a

stranger who was going on that night. "What stranger? Where is he? The Malle-poste is for us, hear you; for us alone." By this time I was standing upon the top of the last flight, and saw in the hall, by the light of a flickering rush-candle held by the host, a figure with coal-black hair and beard, gesticulating violently. When he perceived me descending the stairs he became quite calm of a sudden, and, taking off his hat, bowed low to the ground.

"Monsieur is to be our *compagnon de voyage*, it seems," he said, in a deep musical voice. "It will enliven our dreary progress wonderfully. Permit me to make myself known to you as M. Poirotte. Madame, who is in the carriage, will be charmed to know you."

I could only reciprocate such truly French approaches by others as gracious, and was being desolated at the bare idea of incommoding Madame, when there came to us in clear tones from the box of the Malle-poste, "Sacr -bleu, Messieurs! why do we tarry? These *faquins* of mine are pulling like ten thousand devils!"

"Allons donc," said M. Poirotte, making for the door. "After you. Oh, yes, after you."

And at some risk from the capricious movements of the horses, I was with difficulty lifted into the Malle-poste, and found myself seated safely facing my new fellow-travellers. With a sudden lurch our steeds sprang off, scattering stones and gravel profusely; a hollow concussion, repeated at intervals,

signifying that the body of the vehicle had been struck by the hoofs of these spirited animals.

After a few versts or so of journeying, M. Poirotte begged to be allowed the honour of introducing me to Madame. I could see nothing of Madame's face or figure; but a low voice came forth from the depths of the hood, murmuring some sounds I could not well make out. Presently M. Poirotte grew communicative, and, it must be confessed, very entertaining on sundry passages of his past life, which were of a Bohemian tinge. He had travelled over many lands, and had seen strange countries. In short, before many minutes were over, I was persuaded that I had opposite to me a man of a striking and original turn of mind. It was very different with Madame, who remained obstinately retired within the shadows of the great hood, with her white handkerchief covering up her face. She spoke scarcely a word, except in answer to his oft-repeated inquiries—was she cold? would she like more covering? But when M. Poirotte came to dwell enthusiastically on certain fair plains far away in Dauphiné, where abounded shady bowers and musically-flowing streams, it seemed to me that the handkerchief was agitated curiously, and that hysterical sounds came from the dark clouds where Madame lay reclined. Madame was weeping, it was plain. Upon which M. Poirotte became nervous and fidgety, and was for many minutes whispering with vehement utterance, every now and again stamping his foot impatiently.

"Let us go back,—oh, let us go back, *mon ami*," I heard her say; "there is yet time."

"It is too late, *ma belle*," whispered hoarsely M. Poirotte, and with something like a laugh.

"O non, non," she continued, leaning forward. "Tell him, *monsieur*, to stop—to return."

I saw Madame drawn back hastily into her dark corner, and could just hear M. Poirotte hissing forth some sharp impetuous words. Upon which she appeared to grow more composed, and to subside into weeping and silent affliction; M. Poirotte meanwhile being busy twisting his moustache and grinding his teeth audibly. I was indebted, however, to these mysterious motions for a hasty glimpse of Madame's face, which seemed of a marble character, with darkest of eyes and eyelashes, and a strangely sorrowful cast all over it; very handsome was Madame, if I could put faith in that hurried glance.

From thenceforth M. Poirotte became moody and reserved, keeping up ceaseless thrumming on the carriage-side, and every now and again whispering to his companion. Left thus to myself, I fell into speculation on the two figures before me. What could they be? where were they going? or was it some newly-married pair setting forth upon their travels? Which last conclusion seemed likely enough, since Madame by this time had put down her white handkerchief, and was whispering softly; Monsieur's tattoo dying gradually away.

All this while we had been making a species of mad progress up steep hills, down precipitous declivi-

ties, being drawn along as it were by wild horses. It was surprising how we bounded across little gullies in the road, over great stones and mounds of mud, without immediate breaking-up and going to pieces of our vehicle, like a ship upon the rocks. Still our conductor sat aloft unshaken, whipping, perhaps scourging, forward his fiery beasts, and contriving somehow to keep all together. Very cheerful, but still perilous, was this mode of travelling by Malle-poste. In this fashion we got over many leagues of road, enduring sad concussion all the while, until, at a little past midnight,—or, indeed, it might have been close upon the stroke of one,—we drew near to a small cluster of cottages and farm-houses, which I was told was the village of Aulnoy, and pulled up sharply at the little inn of the place, which bore the name of the Ardent Conscript. The Ardent Conscript was on the sign-board overhead (in gaudy colouring), swinging to and fro with every breath of air.

Madame could go no farther that night, being very much exhausted and fatigued. Monsieur was for going on at all hazards, as soon as fresh horses could be put to, remonstrating besides in fierce whispers. It was plain, however, that she was not equal to it, having sunk down at her first entrance upon a sofa altogether abattue, as remarked the good-natured landlady. We thought at first she had fainted, and wine was brought; but it was evident that she only wanted rest and refreshment. They had been coming many days without stop, and had travelled over some hundreds of miles, and had good right to be tired. So said M. Poirotte to me con-

fidentially, as we stood in a group round Madame upon the sofa, the landlady busy rubbing her forehead with eau-de-cologne and other restoratives. This was by the light of a dull lamp upon the table, which spread a kind of ochre-tinge upon all objects round,—upon Madame's marble-like face also.

I turned to M. Poirotte. "What need," said I indiscreetly, "of this headlong express travelling? Have you any particular object in—"

He bowed low, with a kind of sarcastic smile. "I was welcome to many things at his hands," he said, "being good *compagnon de voyage* and agreeable; but there are certain little secrets—Monsieur, being man of the world, will readily understand this—which we do not confide to every *premier venu*, or first comer."

I muttered some apology for my rather brusque question, but did not the less speculate on the mystery attending these travellers. Could it be that they had been concerned in some strange secret robbery, some vast fraud, accompanied, perhaps, by some dark deed, and they were now flying with guilty haste from justice? Most unlikely, I thought, after a minute's reflection,—most unlikely.

Madame would go straight to her chamber, which was now ready for her, and so wished us good night. Suppose we,—that is, M. Poirotte and I,—were to sit a little by the fire, with cigar and something warm, for—say one half-hour. It was decidedly dreary turning from the cold carriage into still colder cots. For his part, he always fancied a cigar at bedtime. Nothing could be more welcome, as far as I was concerned.

And so, under guidance of the sleepy garçon, we descended the ancient flight of stairs, which creaked un-musically at every step, making progress towards the kitchen, where was to be found the sole fire alive at that early hour. Perilous indeed was the descent, with garçon going on before, and giving warning of fearful chasms, recurring periodically at about every third step. At last we found ourselves in a large stone-flagged room, with a great fireplace facing us, and a gallery, which served as a passage between the bedrooms, running across. The fire was burning very low as we entered, and was stirred up by our conductor into a fitful blaze, which showed to us antique, strangely shaped bits of furniture, and some black wooden figures looking down from various corners of the room. They might have been saints' effigies, or perhaps images of the Grand Henri or Petit Caporal; but looking out as they did from darkness, the firelight lighting up with sudden flash some grotesque feature, I felt as though we were sitting in strange company, and should have fancied our host's own private little salon in preference.

Two tall high-backed chairs were drawn in to the fire; and garçon, having stirred up the smouldering embers into spasmodic life, went his way, leaving us together.

I was little inclined to talk myself, being heartily tired out with the day's journey. It was certainly a curious feeling, finding myself in that lonely cabaret, at long past midnight, stealing every now and then a glance at the black locks and lustrous eyes of the He-

brew countenance near me. By and by M. Poirotte fell into a monologue, going far back into passages of his previous life, which would seem to have been wild and desperate enough. Dark intrigue, midnight adventure, love, hatred, with one duel à l'outrance,—through such stormy paths had been his course. “Even to this hour,” he went on, looking up after the curling smoke of his cigar,—“even to this hour must I follow these troubled ways. What do you suppose has set me down in this wretched cabaret, in company with Madame upstairs? Can you guess? You are making for England, so there is little to fear in your knowing it.”

A light broke in upon me of a sudden. Could it be that Madame had—

“Left her home, husband, children, friends,—all for the sake of the unworthy being who is now speaking.”

“I am truly sorry to hear this,” I said; “for rash steps bring with them only misfortune and remorse.”

“Ay,” said M. Poirotte, “I believe so in my heart; and for that matter, so does poor Madame. It were better for her had she staid with her gray-haired colonel, a brave man and fond husband.”

“But it is not too late,” I said very earnestly. “Do take my advice—return at once; and if my good offices can be of any use—”

“Ah, mon ami,” said M. Poirotte, with a bitter smile, “you know not what manner of man that ancient colonel is. A tall gray warrior, who has seen many battles, and borne scars, full of pride and trust in her. Ah,” continued M. Poirotte, writhing uneasily in his

chair, "that part of the business I would like to shut out from my eyes. I feel we shall owe many troubled dreams to that gray colonel."

"Goodness!" I said, "if you really think this, in Heaven's name, why not do as I say? I tell you again and again it is not too late."

He shook his head. "No, no; we must go on as we have begun, though I know well his grim figure will haunt me, for the shame of it will kill him."

"Hark!" I said, holding up my finger. There was a jingling sound as of chains outside, with rattling of wheels over stones, and postillion's sharp *Ola! ola!* for some one to come forth. Then came mixed voices and clatter of glass as the door was shut-to.

"More travellers on the road," said M. Poirotte, rising. "Oh, this weary night-journeying! We ought to be tired, God knows. Some way my head seems full of dismal fancies."

We did not speak for some minutes, but sat looking at the grate, each in a reverie of his own. Presently it seemed that there were sounds of footsteps afar off, in the direction of the gallery, as though some one were approaching. Through the low arched door at the entrance came light, moving unsteadily, displaying against the wall long dwindled shapes of the old crooked rails of the balustrade. It flickered spasmodically, growing brighter every instant; and presently appeared the garçon, going on before with a lamp, after whom walked a tall figure, with gray moustache, and wrapped in a military cloak. He passed solemnly across, like something seen in a dream, and was gone

in a moment. I scarcely dared to breathe, as I watched the mysterious passage. M. Poirotte had sunk down into his chair and covered up his face with his hands.

"Mon Dieu," said he at length, "all, then, is lost! How well I knew it would come to this! And now, to have this other sin upon my head. What is to be done?"

"But," said I, "things are not come to that yet. He does not know that you are here; and if you are gone early in the morning—"

"Ah, what has been his first inquiry, think you? No, no, my good friend, leave me to myself. It were best. Leave me, I conjure you, and I will strive and think of something."

Seeing him so resolved, I did as he desired; and taking in my hand a primitive lamp which was on the table, made my way up the ancient staircase to my room; a small apartment, garnished with old-fashioned cabinets and bits of furniture, quite black and polished with age.

All was now quiet in the house; but in the next room to me I could hear a ceaseless steady tramp, as though some one were walking up and down; no doubt the gray colonel, wrapped in his cloak, and brooding sorrowfully upon his wrongs. It went on monotonously, that heavy pacing, as though he were keeping guard, until it grew, as it were, into a lullaby, and sent me off in a profound and wearied slumber. Just as my eyes were closing, it seemed to me that his door opened, and that his footsteps died away far down the gallery.

* * * * *

Bright and frosty was the next morning; so bright that M. Poirotte and Monsieur le Colonel had gone forth together shortly after sunrise. They were old friends, garçon believed, laying out breakfast very cheerily. The scenery was fine about Aulnoy, and voyageurs came long distances to see it. And Madame? Madame was still in her chamber, too tired, he suspected, to go forward. By the way, did I know that the early diligence would come by in about two hours, at, say twelve o'clock? It was strange, certainly, that Messieurs had not returned from their walk.

Not quite so strange did it appear to me, who, to say the truth, was filled with heavy foreboding. Some way I was interested in the brave old officer, and could not shut out from myself that mysterious vision of his passage across the gallery, with the light playing on his forehead and gray moustache. Even when I heard the sound of wheels and the clank of chains outside at that late hour, I felt a sort of presentiment, as though some avenging spirit had arrived. Not much relish for breakfast had I that morning.

An hour passed away, then half an hour, when, as I was looking down the road—for the twentieth time perhaps—I saw a horseman spurring hard towards the inn-door. He pulled up quickly and produced a letter from M. le Colonel, directed to Madame. M. le Colonel himself would arrive about noon. He had come straight from a small town some ten miles further on, outside which there had been a murderous duel, *sans témoins*. M. Poirotte was at that moment lying under the trees

beside the brook quite stiff and stark, being pierced through by M. le Colonel's sword.

As he spoke there was to be seen a cloud of dust at the corner of the road, and a familiar jingling sound, mingled with winding of horns, fell upon our ears. It was the great diligence coming over the hill. The little children came running up from the roadsides, the women stood forth at the cottage-doors to see it halt and change horses, and mine host and his following were busy getting ready anticipated petites verres and other refection. Place was found for me inside the huge mountain; and in a few moments the horn was winding cheerily, and I was rolling along the rough high-road, having left far behind me Madame, sitting guiltily in an upper chamber of the Ardent Conscript inn, with no company beyond her letter, with black despair in her heart, and waiting judgment at the hands of her offended husband.

The two following stories were told in the course of our journey by mere undistinguishable birds of passage—nameless and without special mark—who got in at one station and passed away at the next. They were mere temporary canons, and occupied their stalls pro tem. only.

SQUIRE MILTON'S TWO CHRISTMAS EVES.

THE FIRST.

PERCHED high among Lancashire fells, and yet well sheltered by them from roving Winter's blasts, was Red-

fern Grange, where Squire Milton lived all the year round. Roaming tourists were pretty sure to stop and ask whose was the low, old-fashioned, rambling tenement on the hill; and were told by gaping, unlicked rustic (in stupid wonder at such ignorance), "Whoy, thot be Squoire's, o' course!"

Sometimes inquisitive Tourist would set off on a smart trudge up the fells, and arrive quite blown at the old porch; when, if it was show-day (Friday always), Dame Housekeeper would take him round, and say her lesson before every picture. Round through the great gallery, with its dark oaken floor and deeply-recessed windows, looking out, one on the wide, rough, Lancashire country and the Italian ponds, between which ran the avenue; the others on the great paved court which travellers and visitors had to cross. The sepulchral curtains of the window seemed to hang heavily, as though carved of red oak too. Round, also, through the great banqueting room, shaped cross-wise, with oak again here for panneling, and huge swinging doors at top and bottom, of the same dark material; with the mullioned windows, filled in with arms and escutcheons of the family in stained glass. Then would he be given over to one outside, who took him through the quaint old English garden, laid out trimly and pertly as stiff yew-trees and busy shears could make it. Down, then, if he should so fancy it, the dark hobgoblin walk, with trees meeting thickly overhead, and where ghosts were said to wander at night. Which, taking in trudge and all, would be a pleasant day's entertainment for one with stout limbs, and of a walking turn. Putting up, then, well wearied, at his

inn, say in Longley village, he would have sketched in for him, by genial hostess, speaking portraits of "Squoire" and "Squoire's daughter." How he was the bravest, "koindliest," true-heartedest old gentleman in the world; how open-handed and hearty he was; and how his word came as welcome as a golden guinea. You must be up early, it was said, to catch sight of him tramping across his fells, drinking draughts of fresh morning air, jumping drains and ditches, and coming in to breakfast quite pink and glowing. You should have strong limbs to keep up with him as he took you over the farm—across the heavy furrows and steep stiles, up to the old Red Barn, then across to the ten-acre field, down by Penny's copse, and home again by a short cut, taking in the new sheep-washing place and the piggeries. You must have had good lungs not to arrive all puffing and gasping: while Squire would be merely fresh as a rose, and ready for another start after lunch. The finest old man in the world! said all the neighbours, enthusiastically. The real old English gentleman of the song! The genuine old stock, which was dying out, unhappily, too fast! The best portion of Squire Western, the sporting nature of the late Mr. Thomas Moody, whose glories may be yet seen in old coloured prints, the gentle manners of Sir Charles Grandison, were all united in Squire Milton of Redfern Grange.

But, coming on towards that famous season of Christmas-time, when even heaviest hearts lighten and unconsciously forget their trouble, it was well noted how the Squire became literally brisk as a boy, and overflowing with spirits; how his eyes brimmed over with kindli-

ness, and his hands never wearied distributing his bounty to the parish poor. It was his grand jubilee—his high festival. With extraordinary satisfaction he looked to that customary stocking of his larder-magazines; to the wholesale slaughtering of beeves, and curing of meats; to the brewing of mighty ales. For a month before, he was, as he said, busy as a bee. He had that notable Christmas saw eternally in his mouth, to the effect that Christmas only came round once in the year, and that its advent should be welcomed with abundance of good cheer. There should be plenty of every thing, and every thing should be of the best. There should not be a soul within a circuit of many miles who should be found in want of any thing against the eve of the festival. The land should be made, if not to run with milk and honey, at least to overflow with good coals, and warm blanketing, and strong wholesome ale. This was Squire's Christmas gospel. A good and fruitful one, beyond dispute.

These particulars, with many more at the back of them concerning Squire's fair daughter Alice, who alone kept house for him, and the estate, and the people on the estate, would Tourist hear abundantly over that inn-fire. Over that same Longley fire would they have been gladly told again to a fine gentleman from London, who was warming himself there one December evening, a great many years ago; but he was too fine to listen to village tattle, or, most likely, knew already more about the Grange than they could tell him. He had come down by the fast coach "Lightning," and was waiting while a chaise was being got out to take him on. This was Captain Carter, on his way to spend the Christmas,

—his last Christmas, for some time at least, as he was soon to join his regiment at some remote penal colony. Neither was it his first at the Grange, for he liked the place, and its pheasants, and its good air, vastly ; tolerated the Squire as well-intentioned, though a bore ; and fancied exceedingly (more than place, pheasants, good air, and Squire) the daughter of the house, whose name, Alice, was so pretty, and whose prospects were so good. It was a little surprising that a man of figure and ton, whom my Lord had asked to the Abbey, and Sir Charles and Sir John to Charlestown and Johnstown, to meet housefuls of choice company, should have preferred a rough Lancashire Squire's hospitality ; but the fact was, he had come down with a curious plan working mistily in his head, which, as he warmed himself at the inn-fire, began to take shape and figure. He might have spared himself the trouble, for any neighbour could have told him that young Bullington of The Hall was the man—the man after Squire's own heart, though, perhaps, not after his daughter's. With the plan, however, still working in his head, he settled himself in the chaise, by this time brought round to the door, and lit a fragrant cigar. The evening was fresh, with sharp blasts abroad ; and there was a cold, bluish tint outside, just on the verge of deepening into earnest darkness, through which mysterious tone Captain Carter might have seen, as he rattled by, the forge of the village in full work, and blazing cheerfully, where came every horse in the parish to be measured for shoes. He might have seen, too, Longley village church and tower in its ivy cloak, where, by the by, lay many of

Squire's ancestors, in purest Carrara marble, sleeping prone upon their backs; where Squire himself had already selected a snug spot for his own resting-place. He might have seen the old bridge just at the turn of the road, and looked for an instant down the swollen river, and its blunt twists, until, darkness having now well set in, nothing was to be made out clearly but the lights of Redfern Grange twinkling far up among the fells; from which point our Captain (being wholly incurious of Nature and her beauties) enjoyed sweet and refreshing sleep, until wakened by the sudden halting of the chaise at the porch of Redfern Grange, where was standing, with both hands out, Squire himself, welcoming him with heartiest squeeze, and most painful wringing of his arm, which was the probation Captain Carter most dreaded on these visits. Then Squire took him in, and brought him to his daughter,—a tall, fair girl, busy reading poetry,—who seemed a little confused at the meeting. Then Squire shook him again by the hand (our poor Captain wincing a little this time), and said he was very, very glad to have him under the roof of the old Grange once more; that he must not think of leaving them for a good round month; and that they should have such a merry time of it. “For,” says Squire, intoning his favourite stave, “Christmas comes but once a-year, and when it comes,” &c. &c. On which Captain said they were such kind friends to him, and pulled a deep sigh. During the course of dinner he broke to them, tenderly and carefully, the heavy news of his approaching expatriation; and how he knew not the hour when he should be

compelled to depart. The order would come quite suddenly, he said, in low, melancholy tones,—quite suddenly. Which tidings damped Squire's spirits somewhat, and affected his daughter to a degree that young Bullington of The Hall could scarcely have credited, or at least approved of. After dinner, however, Captain Carter told some experiences of his London life, in that droll way for which he has a reputation, and made Squire laugh and laugh again, and Alice smile.

Such a Christmas as it was to be—Squire told him this next morning, as they stood under the porch—no man could so much as form a conception of it! The whole country round should ring with it! The world should admire, and adjacent counties hear with envy! Redfern Grange was to overflow with company; there should be satiety of mirth, of dancing, and of festivity.

“I so love this merry, merry time of Christmas, as they call it in the songs,” Squire said, his eyes beaming, “that I care not how far I go to glorify it. I get quite downhearted when I think that I am to see so few more of these pleasant days. I tell you,” Squire said, with extraordinary vigour, “they may talk of its being old-fashioned, and of the world's getting too business-like for such things, but my mind is, that it is the holiest and happiest feeling a man can have, and that he is all the wiser and better if he have it.”

To which Captain Carter could only answer that it was very proper,—highly proper indeed; and that he had always made it a point to cultivate so healthy

a feeling—'pon his word, he had. He was all the while laboriously lighting a cigar.

Squire then took him to view the monster beast that was presently to furnish forth baron of beef and other cheer; and thence to the buttery, to taste the famous October ale, which made the Captain's strong head feel curiously all the day after. Then both went out over the fells, with dogs and keepers, shooting.

"It'll be here in a week," Squire said, snuffing the air, and looking over at the valley. "The snow, I mean. What say you, Kenrick, man?"

"Ay, sir," says the keeper; "it's coming, surely."

"I am glad of it," Squire says, stamping vigorously; "very glad of it. I like it on the ground half a foot deep."

"It be hard weather on the poor, Squoire," keeper says; which damps his spirits a little.

"Hang it, it shall be made up to them in coals!"

After the morning's work, Captain Carter had usually the rest of the day to himself, which he generously devoted to the task of amusing his young hostess. He read with her in the library; walked with her in the garden; rode out with her in the demesne; in short, conscientiously discharged all the duties of a guest. The only thing that might possibly suggest itself to lookers-on was, what young Bullington would have thought of it. But he was not present to have any thoughts on the matter, and was not to arrive until Christmas-eve.

In this way things went on, and the great festival was very close at hand. Latterly Squire's hands got

to be so full, that he had no time for the shooting; and so Captain Carter was now enabled to devote entire mornings to the amusement of the Squire's daughter, who, curious to say, was now and then observed to be in low spirits, to come down with faint pink rims round her eyes. Perhaps the coming of young Bullington, who would arrive, Squire had gleefully (and not without significance) announced, on Christmas-eve, had something to do with the matter; at all events, Captain was good enough to speak with her on the matter, and impart a little consolation of his own.

"Hang it," Squire said privately to the Captain, "I think Alley is not looking so well; but young Bullington will make it all right. Between ourselves, I hope to see that a match before long. She likes the fellow, I think—speaks of him to you, I dare say? Come, now?"

"Very often," the Captain says, coolly.

And so it came at last to be Christmas-eve morning, with the snow upon the ground several inches deep, as the good Squire had wished and prayed for. He was so happy that morning, bounding and skipping like a child, shaking hands twice over all round, and wishing happy returns from the very bottom of his honest heart. Even cold Captain Carter found a slight blush come upon his cheek as he was so greeted, and had to walk hastily to the window. He was ashamed, perhaps, of that ugly plan which had been working in his head since his arrival. Morning post-bag was brought in, and its letters sorted, as it were, on the breakfast-table. Many for the Squire, two or three for

Alice, and one huge one, with overgrown red seal, and something printed in the corner, for Captain Carter. It seemed to trouble him very much, that official document.

"They are all coming!" Squire said, tearing his letters open one after the other; "they will be here to-night—Bullington and every one of them! We shall have a roaring Christmas of it!"

But Captain made no mention of his official despatch—only biting his lip very savagely as he read. But when Squire was gone out, he told Alice that he should have to leave much sooner than he had calculated on—in fact immediately.

It was holly-cutting day with the Squire, and he went out to see it done—for him the choicest pastime in the world. He had been rambling about for a week before, marking the greenest and most flourishing; and this morning he led a party of stout fellows with bill-hooks to lop vigorously under his direction. The red-berry-laden branches fell fast, and were heaped into carts standing by, some of which Squire followed down to his own parish church at Longley, for the dressing of its chancel had been for many years back a favourite feature in the day's programme. The old chipped pillars were swathed handsomely in that genial green livery. Men on ladders festooned it prettily among the old beams of the roof; and all the sleeping ancestors were made warm and comfortable with thick prickly ruffs, and snug overclothing. The preacher of next day's homily would have to speak as from a great bush of green holly. A brisk, inspiring scene it was,

too—figures with glowing cheeks trooping in up the aisle processionaly, and Squire's voice at times heard from top of a high ladder calling cheerily for more material. He was the happiest man within the length and breadth of the country; for this, he thought to himself, was only sweet foretaste of the morrow. And so, the work done, and that cold evening gray descending, he trotted home blithely. Soon the glowing red lights of his own windows were before him, as beacons. I must hasten, he thought; our guests will be arriving. And with that he touched his horse's flank gently with the spur.

* * * * *

Those were scarcely the faces of Christmas guests that met him at the door. Young Bullington was there, and so, too, was Doctor Ruby, oldest and best of his friends. But why did they stand there so doubtfully? and why were the servants crowded in the hall?

"In Heaven's name, are you afraid of me?" poor Squire said, stamping the snow from his boots. "Wish me a merry Christmas—can't ye?"

"O Squire, Squire!" young Bullington said, with something like a sob, for he was a soft-hearted country lad, "there is to be no merry Christmas this time. She is gone—Alice, your daughter!"

"Gone—my daughter!"

"Gone away with the officer!"

Squire Milton gasped out something, and kept looking from one face to the other for several moments. They saw he was falling to the ground, and caught

him in their arms just in time. That fit held him many, many days. It went near to killing him.

With which sudden metamorphosis of green, cheerful holly and red berries into dark cypress, ends the first act, as it were, of this little chronicle.

THE SECOND CHRISTMAS EVE.

By a hard struggle, and good aid from that stout constitution of his, Squire Milton fought off the terrible sickness that had stricken him down. But he was no longer to be seen tramping over his fells at early morning, or following hounds and horn with cheerful shout. He looked listlessly on all things about him, and moped solitarily in his garden all day long—leaning on his stick, which was now for the first time of real assistance to him. Poor Squire, said the neighbours; what a change! Heaven forgive her who was the cause of it! It was, indeed, there only that she was likely to obtain pardon; for the few words her father was ever heard to speak concerning her were those of hatred, and even vengeance. When his eye fell on any relic or memorial of her, his breath came fast, and his fingers closed nervously. “She has disgraced me,” he said, over and over again,—“disgraced me and my family! I shall never forgive her—never, never—not if I was to die within an hour!”

By and by came round Christmas; but he could not bring himself to wait for that festival. With what sort of gladness could he celebrate its coming? with what heart cut holly? So he shut up the place, as it

is called, and set out for foreign parts—his old friend Ruby bearing him company. Their Christmas-day they spent in a small, wretched Italian town—heavy rains pouring down all day long. Every thing was drenched, and the street was turned into a mud-swamp. Squire and his friend looked out from a window with heaviest hearts. There was no holly—no ivy—no snow—no cheerful faces. Squire was thinking how at that moment, across the seas at Redfern Grange, the yeomen and their wives, all in their best, with the brightest, happiest faces in the world, were trooping in to the village church—decked out, perhaps, in verdant livery, as he had been used to do it with his own hands. Just at that hour would Redfern Grange have become as a beacon-light to the whole country—cheerful red curtains being drawn close before every window. Well, well, those days were gone for ever! and instead—here were wretched, drenched Italians struggling through the mire. No holly—no red berries—no ivy! All gone for ever! And as he thought over these things, his teeth became set together, and he muttered again, “Never, never, shall I forgive her!”

So went by two and three years more; during which time the two travellers wandered together from city to city, with steady mending of Squire's health. They saw all the wonders that travelling folk are brought to admire, and admired with the rest. During which time came, as was to be expected, penitent, heart-broken letters from the daughter, dated from that distant colony whither she had gone with her Captain. The penitent letters were genuine enough, filled with

despairing yearnings after that lost home. The Captain was cold and careless, but was at present grievously sick. Money she did not want; nothing but one little word of forgiveness from the best and tenderest of fathers—cruelly wronged and outraged. “Never, never, never!” said Squire, burning the letter.

Presently it got about among the tenants that Squire was coming home again, having grown weary of foreign places. Folk went up to the Grange to know if this news was certain, and there had it from the steward himself, that by the middle of December, at furthest, Squire would indeed be back in the old place. Great and tumultuous joy at this intelligence. The old place, they said, had never been itself since his departure—a certain decay and neglect having set in. Now every thing would be made straight, now that the absent master was coming home.

So one night (it was about the twentieth or twenty-first of December), when the snow was pretty thick upon the ground, and every pond and canal up and down the country was frozen hard, a chaise passed through Longley village, taking the road to the Grange, with two gentlemen in cloaks inside. By morning it was known through the parish that Squire was come home at last, and that the old house was tenanted again. That same morning he was seen walking over his grounds—much bent, much altered, and leaning on a stick, shaking hands with many.

“Ruby,” he says, at the end of the day, “my old chilled heart is warming up at the sight of these old faces. I thought it had been frozen to death long ago!”

His friend tells him, that as they are just on the eve of that famous festival—once so loved and cherished by him—he should rouse himself, and strive to keep it as they had kept it of old. It was, besides, a duty that he owed his people.

“Ah,” says Squire, with a sigh fetched from the bottom of his heart, “those days are gone for ever!—ever since—”

And then Ruby diverts the subject to the place, and its people, and its improvements; but takes care to come back to it again shortly, and with visible effect. The old man is seen looking wistfully at the holly-bushes and green ivy. He thinks they never were so fine as this year, or the berries so red.

Meantime the Grange post-bag has been bearing to Ruby many notes, in delicate female hand, which, had Squire been at all curious, he might have recollected as being once very familiar to him. Matters plainly growing out of these little letters had he been hinting of to the Squire, but, seemingly, without avail; for the fatal “Never, never!” forcing itself through set teeth, prevented his going much further. Still the letters came.

The days went by swiftly enough, and Squire's heart warmed gradually. He seemed to be struggling with himself, but at last gave way. Soon it was known that Christmas was to be once more kept in the old fashion. Orders had gone forth, as of old, for promiscuous slaughter of stock and fat poultry—for gathering in of provision; and one prime beast had been marked by Squire himself for furnishing the great

baron of beef. There was curing, and preserving, and gathering, and garnering—all as of old—with which brave work they were busy down to the night before Christmas-eve itself.

That night were Squire and Ruby sitting together over a great crackling fire. Outside, the snow was coming down with extraordinary vigour and perseverance.

“Heaven help all poor wanderers such a night as this!” said Squire. “We who have stanch roofs over us should be thankful!”

On which opening, Ruby began to press dextrously enough the subject which had been so long working in his head. But Squire, with flushed cheeks, and quite excited, rose up suddenly and said he would hear no more of that matter—that his mind was made up for good and all—and that he would take it ill of his friend if he was troubled again with it. On which Ruby, quite as warm, protests against such hardness of heart. “You must hear me,” he goes on, “if you take it ever so unkindly. She has written to me that her husband—for you know well he *did* become her husband—”

“I don’t believe it!” says the Squire, still with flushing cheeks.

“Her husband,” Ruby continues, “is now dead, and will not trouble you or her longer!”

“Dead!” says the Squire, starting.

“Dead!” continues Ruby; “and she is left helpless, destitute, and abandoned by every one, relation and all.”

"And whose doing was that, pray?" says the Squire, trying hard to sneer.

"It was her misfortune," Ruby answers, "and the fault of her poor foolish head. However, thank Heaven! she has one friend who will see that she does not starve. As you said a while ago, Heaven help all who have no roof over their heads!"

Squire looks at him and breathes hard, but says not a word more.

By next morning, which was Christmas-eve morning, the snow had stopped for good, and it was as fine and fresh a day for walking abroad as could be desired. The ground, too, was hard and crisp, and it was famous Christmas weather altogether. Squire had gone forth well nigh as briskly as in the old times; only there was a little shade of trouble in his eyes. That night was to arrive a troop of guests, all bidden to keep up the old Christmas reputation of the house. Squire felt himself irresistibly drawn into the absorbing spirit of the time. That very night, too, was there to be a feast and high revel in the oak hall to tenants and retainers, who were to eat, drink, and be merry under the Squire's own eye. Perhaps, too, the best occasion they could have of welcoming back the old lord of the soil. That evening they would be seen, all decked out in their best, coming up processionally along the avenue—a glad and a cheerful sight.

Meantime, drawn on by the spell, Squire had wandered down to his village church, where they were putting up the holly once more. The people were on ladders, and there were the carts of green material

standing at the door. Their ivy cloaks were being fitted on once more to the marble ancestors, and the prickly ruffs tied about their throats. Squire Milton looked on at the work until it came to be dusk—looked on without speaking a word, for his heart was overflowing with the strangest emotions. He was thinking of the last time he had witnessed that holly-clothing, and with what a glad, youthful soul he had stood by—with what joyful anticipation he had ridden homeward, and what had met him as he reached the door. This was his entertainment as he now mounted and proceeded slowly back to the Grange.

Across the whitened country he could see crimson lights in the Grange windows, gladdening every eye that turned thither with suggestions of inexpressible comfort within. All up the avenue there were deep wheelmarks in the snow, betokening arrivals fast and frequent; and presently empty chaises passed him by returning, whose drivers wished his honour a merry Christmas, which he returned absently, yet not without a strange agitation in his breast. Coming then into his hall, there were there many cloaked and muffled travellers to surround him thickly, and wring his hand heartily, and wish him joy of his return. One after another the old faces shone out on him—kind speeches, words of welcome, rang in his ears ceaselessly—the hum of dear familiar voices confused him. His eyes grew dim as they wandered from one to the other. Yes, it was the old time back again, thank God!

Young Bullington, who had travelled some hundred miles for this meeting, was standing beside him. The

lamps were lighted in the great hall; the people were gathered there and waiting; all things were ready.

"Dear friend," said the Squire, in low tones, "take the gentlemen with you; leave me to myself for a few minutes."

And so they departed for the hall, whence came the hum of many voices expectant; and Squire Milton, sinking back into a chair, covered his face up with his hands. Presently he felt a hand upon his shoulder. His friend Ruby was standing over him.

"Look up, dear old friend," the latter said hurriedly, and in much agitation; "tell me what is it troubles you?"

"I am thinking," said the Squire, lifting his head wearily, "what a generous, heartstirring day this might have been—all but for this dead weight upon my heart, which I cannot shake off."

"It lies with yourself," Ruby went on, speaking very fast. "Heaven knows this is no season for perpetuating hard feuds and cruel thoughts. This is time for forgiving of greatest injuries—for offering up of old offences at the foot of your own holly-dressed altar yonder, at Longley."

Still the Squire answered not a word, but let his head drop again.

"You have not a hard heart—I know you well by this time," Ruby went on. "Why, then, this cruel turning of your face away from me, once so dear to you? You said last night there should not be one soul unhappy within the length and breadth of the parish."

Squire Milton started—the colour came again to his cheeks. “What do you mean?” he said, nervously.

“Do you hold to that noble purpose?” continued Ruby. “Think—only think—this is Christmas-eve—the holiest season.”

“I durst not,” the Squire said, faintly. “I have sworn never—”

“What, if all in the parish are happy!” Ruby went on, turning to the door,—“and one—only one—is to be turned from this door—out upon the snows—from her own father’s hearth—”

“Where, where?” Squire Milton said, wildly. “What do you mean? It cannot be. I have sworn to—”

There was a sudden rustle as of woman’s garments, and a sobbing figure in black at the Squire’s feet, clasping his knees!

* * * * *

That was the most famous night ever known within the walls of Redfern Grange—a night of joy and thanksgiving, and crowned by the exercise of the holiest of all virtues. Beneath the cold snows outside lay the Squire’s oath and resentment, covered up by them carefully; and they never entered that house again!

AT WOLF’S CASTLE.

THERE is a tottering red-brick inn in the city of Toulouse; an ancient hostel, well scored with many cracks

and wrinkles. There is a traveller inside, uttering imprecations against the institutions of the country; moreover, waiting for the horses. They have set him, poor soul, for peace-sake, in their best apartment,—one with a famous bow-window, and noble prospect of the town; but he only yearns to cast the dust from off his shoes, and have done with them utterly. Meantime, while he performs an unholy tattoo upon the window-panes it may not seem wholly unprofitable to set forth how that traveller came to be bestowed in that unpromising neighbourhood, and under so provincial a sky.

The year previous, I—no other than the wroth voyageur of the inn—had the good fortune to make M. Dangeau's acquaintance at the famous baths of Ems. A pleasant man, M. Dangeau, like most of his countrymen; pleasantest, perhaps, when assisting at little private fumigations, or in extricating one from that Slough of Despond a table-d'hôte of strong Anglican complexion. Just before my departure, it became known to me that my friend was, to use a delicate phrase, somewhat peculiarly circumstanced. M. Dangeau was, so to speak, becalmed, and drifting about uneasily, waiting for the wind. In this extremity, I was not found wanting; and M. Dangeau went his way rejoicing, provided with the needful funds. To say the truth, I had misgivings as to the fate of my napoleons; for, with all faith in my late commensal, I could not shut out a truth known to all of any Brunnen experience, that those with the laxest notions concerning money-matters are the most gentleman-like and insinuating of their species. At no distant date, however, arrived

my moneys, together with exuberant thanks; the despatch concluding with an earnest request that I would come and take up my abode as soon as convenient at the Château des Loups, on this side of the Pyrenees. So came I to be bestowed in doleful Toulouse,—in Toulouse of the rueful countenance, at the very back of God speed; so came there to be a moody traveller in its crazy red-brick inn, looking from the bow-window, and waiting for the horses.

They came round at last,—those steeds so ardently desiderated, and I was securely fastened up in a rickety vehicle; red-brickdom was soon a pleasant prospect in the distance. We journeyed on all that day, catching glimpses now and again of other little red towns; for a brief span, too, floating sluggishly down the Garonne; until at last, about ten o'clock that night, a whip-handle was pointed in the direction of a dark clump of trees, indicating that the wished-for Château des Loups was in that direction. A few minutes more and we had pulled up before a tall repulsive gateway, all over plates of iron, like a prison-door; which, after long ringing at a bell, hung high among the trees, came at last to be opened by two strange salvage men, very wicked-looking and unkempt. One held a flaring torch high over his head, by whose light I made out a black aisle-like avenue, formed of great yews meeting overhead,—a veritable yew-tree tunnel, exceedingly disquieting to weak minds. It was then bluntly notified to me that I should have to walk up, there being a part of the road, where a bridge had broken down, impassable for carriages. Accordingly my mails were got

down, and shouldered by one of the salvage men, while the torch went on a good bit in front. After a dark and dispiriting journey of some ten or fifteen minutes, we suddenly emerged, to my great comfort, upon a grateful plaisance, garnished abundantly with fountains, statues, cool bowers, sun-dials, and other such pleasant conceits, the moon shining tranquilly over all. Exceedingly refreshing was the prospect after that awful probation. There was a stately château before me, with its broad sloping roof pierced for many windows, with the usual high minaret, or bell-tower, most likely place of congregation for the rooks. Before I could take note of any thing else, a figure came running down the steps to meet me, and in a moment more I was heartily bidden welcome to Wolf's Castle.

An hour after I found myself bestowed before the fire, in a venerable oak-room, with a bottle of miraculous Burgundy between us. I was infinitely refreshed by that noble fluid. We were very glad to see each other, and got very pleasant over certain Brunnen experiences, when we had heard the chimes at midnight, and later too.

"After all," said M. Dangeau, stirring the logs with his foot, "this is a dreary place to have brought you to; you will die of ennui in a week's time. Rude wild sports, such as the *chasse au sanglier*, mountain shooting, and a little music of an evening,—behold all the poor entertainment I and my sister have to offer you."

His sister! I felt a sudden chill,—a dim presentiment of coming dangers, of hidden shoals and quick-

sands. His sister ! wherefore his sister ? how came I not to hear of her before ? I shook my head, mentally, and held that here my friend Dangeau had slightly protruded the cloven hoof.

Later on we took our way to the drawing-room,—a very wilderness of buhl and marqueterie and delicate colouring, over which a soft and subdued light, as of shaded *modérateurs*, was playing. Afar off on the sofa, I could see the presiding beauty of the wilderness : a being with dark round eyes and darker hair, with great gold pins and chains at the back, and a dress of lace and bright colours, after the Spanish fashion. As I stood before her, the large eyes roamed over me with a sort of haughty inquiry, which, to say the truth, rather confused me. A regular Spanish Circe, this sister of Dangeau, thought I ; but nevertheless seated myself on the sofa in dangerous proximity to the sorceress.

“Angélique,” said Dangeau, “thank the *bon Dieu* in your prayers to-night for sending us this stranger. We must make much of him, my sister. Though for that matter ’tis a crime to bring a Christian man to such a place. Wolf’s Castle ! call it rather Ghoull Palace !”

Circe looked up. “Do *you* think so badly of our old mansion ? It is a fashion with my brother to abuse it—only a fashion.”

Being thus appealed to, I of course was loud in praise of its beauties. There was one thing, however, I *must* protest against, and that was the awful avenue of yews.

"It is a horribly suicidal place," said Dangeau; "I am always expecting to see a woodcutter dangling from one of the branches. It should have been cut down years ago but for the Mère Angélique here." (He had got this name for her out of the old Jansenist controversy.)

"Oh, monsieur," said Circe, turning to me, "I love every one of those old yews, and should grieve were but a branch touched."

"As for that," said her brother, "we must have them thinned, and let in a little daylight. Am I not right?" he added, turning to me.

"Why—yes—that is," I said hesitatingly,—for they were both looking to me for an answer,—"that is, if mademoiselle—"

But mademoiselle's lip was now curling scornfully.

"You would have him sell them, perhaps, monsieur? They would bring money."

"No, sweet Angélique," said Dangeau coolly, "they are too old for that; but Antoine and his woodmen shall certainly visit them to-morrow."

Circe's eyes flashed out; but it seemed to me that I was the chief object of their wrath. "You would not be so cruel, so barbarous," said she at length; "I declare it would be a crime. And all because this stranger here" (a quivering finger pointed me out to public scorn) "would have you follow the cold-hearted principle of his nation! Sir, you would have us turn our heart, soul, affections, every thing, into gold! Ten thousand thanks!"

Very much hurt at this unprovoked attack, I said, in a halting kind of fashion, that mademoiselle accused me very unjustly; that I had given no advice whatever on the subject; that M. Dangeau, I was sure, would bear me out in this.

“For Heaven’s sake, Angélique,” said Dangeau, evidently vexed at the turn matters were taking, “be not so wilful. You shall have your trees, spoiled child—there!”

But the Mère Angélique had swept indignantly from the room, the black mantilla streaming behind her. I looked after her in exceeding astonishment.

“She will come round in the morning,” said her brother. “She has Spanish blood in her veins, and is a little wicked sometimes. N’importe, she is a noble creature; and so you will think when you know her better.”

That night I had long before my eyes the figure of the wayward Spaniard, as she swept so haughtily past me. “A very scornful dame,” I thought, as I settled myself to sleep, “but fair, passing fair! If one only knew how to tame her, I should not mind playing Petruchio. Suppose I try.”

After breakfast next morning, I was sent forth to view the lions in the neighbourhood, that being a kind of duty incumbent on all strangers; the inhabitants taking great pride in their lions. These, of course, included a famous healing spring of the place; the fearful hollow where the man was killed last year; also the gap in the mountain-side with the curious and delightful echo. This duty per-

formed, but utterly wearied out, I was permitted to return home, just in time to get ready for dinner.

Mademoiselle was not well enough to assist at that meal; and I cannot help fancying I should have found it more entertaining had she been present. There was one little incident during dinner that struck me as rather curious. Just when the wine and fruit were being set on, some one came in and whispered Dan-geau; who thereupon rose up, and left the room hastily. I sat there, I suppose, for more than half an hour, and then thought I would go to the drawing-room, where I would find him, most likely; perhaps Mademoiselle Angélique. Passing through, I ran full against two conspirator-like men, with cloaks, who, in much confusion, stepped hastily aside into the shadow. What might be the business of those suspicious-looking gentry?

In the drawing-room I found the Mère Angélique alone, arrayed in the Spanish picturesque fashion, with perhaps a shade less colour in her cheeks. I had not forgotten the rather pointed manner in which I had been held up to scorn the night before; so I assumed a reserved and stately manner as I inquired after her health. She was well now, she answered coldly enough. I was sorry to hear she had been suffering from headache. It was gone; and now that I had sufficiently complied with the ceremonial of society, suppose we talked of something else. Had I seen her brother?

Here was a thrust for Petruchio! I should have hoped, I said, with a wounded manner, that the fact

of M. Dangeau being my friend would interest me in the well-being of any of his family; but it was quite evident that mademoiselle was prejudiced against me.

"No," said she; "I should scarcely be unreasonable. Recollect that I have the misfortune of knowing you no longer than a single day."

"Mademoiselle is very severe," I said.

"Very, no doubt. For not discovering your perfections in that short time. It would be possible, would it not? And yet I know what were your thoughts when you entered the room. You thought you would encourage me—perhaps patronise me—with that grand air. Ah, you islanders can be read like books!"

I was decidedly making a very poor figure. When was the taming à la Petruchio to begin? But though smarting under this treatment, I determined to keep my good-humour, and so answered, with a *very* forced laugh, "Mademoiselle has wonderful penetration; but I hope to give her no more trouble, as I mean to remove myself without delay to my own wretched island."

The large eyes here settled on me for an instant; they were filled with compunction.

"Forgive," said she, putting out her hand. "I have been very malicious, and you so good-humoured. Let us be friends."

This was really magnanimous; so I struck my colours, and wisely forbore all Petruchian ideas. It is surprising what excellent friends we became. Later

on, a guitar was brought out, and little ballads of a fervid tendency were chanted sweetly enough, and excited boundless enthusiasm among the audience.

It was late that night before I found myself in my room. Some way I did not feel sleepy; and the moon was shining so gloriously, that, instead of turning into bed, I threw the shutters wide open, and walked out upon the balcony, with a kind of veranda overhead. There I sat and cogitated, and admired, and cogitated again,—not a little, I must confess, upon the *Mère Angélique* and her strange ways. Just to my right was the Yew Tree Cave, as I had christened it, with a great black cloud hovering over the entrance. A very mysterious, ill-looking region it seemed. “He was right,” I said, “in calling this Ghoulish Palace; most certainly the ghouls live down there.” What particularly struck me, being something of a painter, were the strange and fanciful shapes the shadows had fallen into. For instance, hard by the mouth of the cave I made out the shape of a horse, with the high Spanish saddle and accoutrements all complete. I speculated long upon the horse, and tried hard to shape a rider for him out of the neighbouring shadow. At times, too, the breeze would stir the branches behind, and give the appearance of the shadow’s moving its hind-leg. How singular, how curious, is nature in her vagaries!

Singular indeed! if what followed was to be accepted as one of her eccentricities; for at that moment a loud neighing seemed to come from the shadow. I was startled. It was plain there was a genuine bonâ-

fide horse there. I was welcome to that fact. What to do next was now the question. It would be easy to rush blindly to the yard and pull frantically at the alarm-bell. But a simpler and more judicious course would be to go to Dangeau's room, and bring him to view the mysterious quadruped. I was turning away on this errand, when I thought I heard the sounds of footsteps on the gravel below. The next instant I was looking cautiously over the balcony, and was much confounded at seeing a tall man in a cloak stealing across the lawn; no doubt making for the shadowy steed. "The plot is thickening," I thought to myself, looking after him through the trellis-work of the veranda; but there was more yet to come. For the caballero turned round suddenly, as if he had been called back, then hastily retraced his steps. (Intense excitement in the veranda.) Just as he reached the trees, I saw another figure glide out and join him; a woman's. Some Pessita or Nina, no doubt, belonging to the house, meeting her swain by moonlight alone. No mystery, after all! Tenez, mon ami, the caballero is moving, and both have come a little forward out of the shadow. The next moment Nina's (or Pessita's) face was turned up full to the moon's.

I was utterly confounded; it was incredible! I would look again. It was no mistake. I knew those eyes and that white forehead too well. Hark! speaking too: "To-morrow night!" There, she is taking leave of the noble caballero. O false, fleeting, perjured Mère Angélique!

Here was a discovery! This was the cold haughty

creature that so brought me to book the night before; this was the proud Castillian dame who took so much to heart the impending fate of an old tree. Pessita, Nina, forsooth! honest respectable girls that never indulged in such pranks; though when their mistress does so, why not they? A man in a cloak! It was as good as a play. I was so amused at the idea, that I flung my cigar into the grate, and threw myself with desperate violence upon the bed. I dreamt all night long of men with cloaks, who distressed me exceedingly; particularly a series of large men, who came one after the other, and sat on me for varying periods. I must confess that, on waking next morning, I felt very much mortified; for I fancied I had made a little way, especially after the reconciliation of the night before. But the man with the cloak had cured me of such delusions. I felt in a savage vein, and only wanted to feed fat my rage and vexation. Should I tax her with it openly; bring on a grand scena,—furious brother, tableau!—and leave the house in a storm? No; I would fright her guilty soul with strange allusions and mysterious hints. I would keep her on the rack; that was better. So I finished dressing in all haste, and went down to breakfast with a very grim countenance indeed.

Dangeau was waiting for me, with tidings that the Mère—mademoiselle, I mean—Angélique was too unwell to come down.

“My dear friend,” said he, taking up the tea-pot, “when the excellent Père Methusaleh reached that fine old age of his, believe me, he knew as little about the

ways of women as you or I do. It is an awful riddle, whereof no man hath the mot."

So present vengeance was snatched from me. But I could wait; it would come later. There was to have been *chasse au sanglier* to-day; but the rain streaming down in torrents, put that wholly out of the question. So the men with the queer horns round them went to their homes; and Dangeau and I, by the aid of pistol-shooting, lurching, lounging about, and such dreary devices, managed to prolong existence until dinner-time.

I felt a little nervous when I found myself in presence of the frail being so addicted to moonlight and men with cloaks. She was full of spirits, and welcomed me with great good-humour, which civility I acknowledged with an executioner's smile. We sat down to dinner; and after a proper interval, when the soup had been removed, I thought it time to fire the train.

"A miserable day, truly," I said; "and yet last night the moon was shining most poetically—towards one o'clock, that is."

"Why," said Dangeau, "you won't persuade us you were up at that hour."

"Pardon me, I was; and what is more, sat in the balcony for hours enjoying the romantic prospect. Shall I help *mademoiselle*?"

Mademoiselle was in great disorder, and had turned very pale. But she had her pride to help her; and when I next stole a glance, she was looking at me with scorn and defiance. It was impossible to break her spirit, yet I would try again. Certainly, I would try again.

"By the way, Dangeau, that reminds me. Have you any person that goes round of nights, any watcher?"

"Not I," said he. "Why do you ask?"

"Because,"—here I looked steadily at her,—“because it seemed to me that people were going about last night. I certainly heard voices.”

She was paler now, but still sat unsubdued. I only felt more remorseless.

"You astonish me!" said Dangeau, who now struck me as being a little discomposed himself.

"If I had had only common curiosity," I went on, "I need only have looked over the balcony to have seen their faces. In fact,"—here I looked steadily at Mademoiselle Angélique,—“I thought I recognised one of the voices.”

She was conquered at last, and dropped her eyes upon the table. Dangeau abruptly changed the conversation, and the rest of the meal was as dreary as could well be imagined. To say the truth, this constant warfare must have been wearying to all parties; in spite of all good intentions, I was only making myself disagreeable. The best thing, in short, was to depart on the first available excuse. And yet I would have found it pleasant—perhaps too pleasant—if the Mère Angélique had been only a little tractable. But, then, last night; and the tryst for to-night. No; I had done with her for ever.

A cloud fell upon us for the rest of that evening, and the conversation grew spasmodic and disjointed, like the dropping fire of musketry. The "situation" was growing painful; and I must confess it was a relief

when mademoiselle got up to retire for the night. Dangeau went out to fetch her candle, when she turned hastily to me, as if she had waited for the opportunity.

"Don't judge me harshly," she said in a haughty manner, as though issuing a command. "I may not speak to-night, but to-morrow I shall explain every thing."

I thought of all I had heard below the balcony, and I suppose an incredulous smile was upon my lips.

"Well, you disbelieve me," she said. "It is little matter. To-morrow you shall hear me. Good night."

It was about twelve o'clock when I shut myself in for the night; and my first thought was to throw open the window, and take up my post in the veranda. There was no moon out that night, but a heavy drizzling rain falling. "He will not come to-night," I said aloud, "that man with the cloak. But she will be waiting. Yes, he will come. The precious meeting will be. How lucky it was I found her out! I might have been taken in by her tricks and minauderies. And yet what eyes! what an appealing look she gave with them! I must have a heart of stone. I was cruel; certainly very cruel. But the man with the cloak!"

Soon after this soliloquy, I think I must have fallen asleep in my chair; for I recollect finding myself of a sudden, and the lamp burning very dimly indeed. On looking at my watch, I found it was close upon two. I pushed away my chair in disgust. I was always doing something absurd and extravagant.

I started up; for at that moment I heard a shot close by, in the direction of the dark avenue. Then came another and another. What could it all mean? I was out on the balcony in an instant, but could hear nothing more. Yes; I could hear something now—a dull hollow sound, coming nearer and nearer, as of horses tramping,—all, too, in the direction of Ghoul Avenue. Perhaps the ghouls were abroad to-night. It was drawing nearer. And suddenly from out the black mysterious cloud at the entrance came riding forth furiously a long train of horsemen, each leading a mule, and making straight for the hall-door. 'Two o'clock in the morning—shots—and a band of wild fellows at the door: was I dreaming? What would come next? Going out upon the gallery, I heard voices and strange confusion below, and ran down with all haste to the hall.

It was filled with people. All the servants and retainers of the house were there, together with strange-looking men in picturesque jackets and Spanish hats, all talking at the same time, and dragging in huge bales just unstrapped from the mules. And there, in this wild scene of confusion, directing, inspiring, and encouraging,—the guiding spirit of the whole,—was to be seen the *Mère Angélique*.

I knew what it all meant now, what was the significance of the mules, the packages, and the dark-looking men.

I gathered from voices near me that the *gens-d'armes* would be there in a moment, having only gone back for reinforcements. They had the worst of it in

the Yew-tree Avenue. But she, the Mère Angélique, to be in such a place, mixed up with so desperate an enterprise!

I found myself beside her. She seemed filled with excitement.

"Ah!" said she, with a curious laugh, "you have come down at a strange moment. Well, perhaps it is for the best. You shall see what the brave contrabandistas can do. I know what you suspected last night; but you were wrong!"

She stopped. There was a sound of horsestramping outside; a sign the enemy was at hand. Dangeau came running down-stairs with a musket in his hand. He started on seeing me.

"Forgive me," said he, "for having brought you into this. But it is too late now for excuses; you had better go to your room."

"And Mademoiselle Angélique?"

"I can protect my sister," he said coldly. "Go while there is time."

As he spoke, there came a loud knocking at the door, and voices were heard demanding admittance. The besiegers were at hand. I looked round for the Mère Angélique. She was standing on the stairs, with her black hair falling about her shoulders, looking like a heroine of old.

"Now, dear friends," said she, bringing them all round her with a wave of her snowy arm, "now is the hour. Fight like brave men as you are."

And with a shout they all flew past her up-stairs to take post at windows and loopholes, or any spot that

commanded the enemy. She was following them slowly, when she suddenly turned, and saw me looking after her with wonder and admiration.

"We are friends now," she said, with a bright smile I often thought of afterwards, "though very late."

I caught the hand that was extended to me. "I have many things," I said, "to beg forgiveness for; but let me prove my sorrow by this day doing battle for you."

"Once more the knocking was repeated, together with, "Au nom du roi, ouvrez!"

"Quick," said I, "give me a sword!"

"What," she said, "fight with them? impossible! You would be fatally compromised."

"No matter, I shall protect you."

"Look out," said Dangeau, "they will force the door."

All in the hall rushed in that direction; and, catching the enthusiasm, I was hurrying after the rest, when suddenly I was seized from behind by strong arms, and was borne away in spite of all resistance. I just caught a glimpse of the white figure on the stairs waving an adieu to me; and that was the last I ever saw of the *Mère Angélique*.

Then was I led away violently towards the back of the house by long subterranean ways, as it seemed to me, and at last a trap-door was raised, and we found ourselves in a kind of cottage, which was hidden in a small wood. So had the *Mère Angélique* providentially taken thought for my safety. The *château*

was still in full view; they were defending it right gallantly. I walked on, sorrowfully enough, to the next village, some four miles off, where I found horses, and lost no time in placing myself beyond the reach of the constitutional authorities of la belle France.

* * * * *

Passing that way long after, I found the Château des Loups abandoned, and falling to ruin; and heard from the neighbours that Dangeau was dead, and his sister, La Mère Angélique, a nun in a convent at Seville.

It was now wearing on to daybreak, and such as had last looked at their watches, with bleared, strained eyes, called the hour as being gone half-past three. The snow sheeting which lay so close upon the ground for miles round—upon the hedges, the ponds, the branches, the mills, and homesteads, like the crust of a monster bride-cake—brought on premature daylight, with a sense of shivering and general discomfort. Cheerful Horn, with his indomitable spirit and bold defiance of drowsiness, had broken down at last, and lay back, sleeping a troubled sleep. The shooting-men take short snatches, wake up, and look abroad restlessly. My own eyes have a strained, tightened wakefulness, which it is hopeless to think of contending with.

Half-past four. The dry clergyman gone. Another station approaching. Rather a halt than a professed titular station. For I see a heavy turnpike-gate, and a low, red farmhouse, and something like a water-mill out of

work, and a general air of agricultural roughness. And I see, too, behind the hedge, a light gig drawn up close, with its muffled driver tramping it in the snow up and down. The light gig and tramping driver are come for the young shooting-men. Harrowdale Hall lies off yonder, behind the copse, most likely, where there will be merry breakfasting that morning. So I wish them good speed from my heart. We seemed to be friends from that long night's acquaintance; and as the door shut behind them, and I saw them climbing briskly into their light gig, with a hearty greeting to the muffled driver, I seemed to have slipped back again into my old desolation and old loneliness. The snow crunches with a sort of music beneath their wheels, as they take the turn sharply, and strike out towards the copse. Happy shooting men!

Before long the Cheerful Horn has dropped away too, making feint of a boisterous good by. Another stage, and the quiet, thoughtful face is missing. It lightens, and lightens, and gradually the cold gray fades off. There are long canals below us, ice-bound and unnavigable. There are stray houses of a rude sandstone common to these parts, and we roll into a great red town, a city of factories and tall chimneys, all in broad daylight, just as the hands are going to work. With weary eyes and stiffened limbs I descend, leaving behind me the sickly lamp burning still. A halt here for some hours in a busy inn; thence northward by another railway. Journeying steadily from noon until close on the stroke of four, we slacken speed, moving across a deep valley on a great viaduct of the rough

sandstone. I recognise something familiar in the look of that valley; in the great heavy mountain far off on the right; in the swell and fall of the ground: dim, indistinct memories of boy-years, confused by the new staring viaduct that runs so rudely across the smiling valley. A gray mossy tower—part of old abbey ruins—glides slowly by, and I begin to feel that here is something not altogether strange to me.

A lonely wooden station perched high on the arches, with a lonely man in charge, who came out to wonder what business could bring the stranger into this solitary region, and presently the train had passed on out of the valley, leaving me with the lonely man on his lonely platform. It was nearly dark, and a light or two twinkling below showed where there was still an inn of the old pattern not yet departed; whither the lonely porter went off silently to order up a chaise for Mytton Grange, distant some six miles. But I found that the old inn was gone long since; and, in its stead, there had risen a cold public-house, with a new sign and a new proprietor. The only chaise and the only horse were being got out hastily; and in a few seconds I was on the road to my old home.

With a tremulous feeling at my heart, I looked from the window for such old landmarks and tokens as ought to be familiar to me: for the old bridge just clear of the village where we used to fish (standing under its arches on the mossy bank where the trees stretched over, making a bower and giving a pleasant shelter); but the road had taken a sweep, and I was now crossing a fresh rough-hewn structure, and yonder were the

relics of the old bridge—three gray broken arches, all stripped and jagged. But other lesser things were left us: a good mile further on, the great stone-trough, up the steep hill, where the wagon-horses used to halt and drink; the stone-cross over the old quarry, marking where one dark November night old Joe Bradly, the keeper, was cast down and dashed to pieces; the wooden stile leading to the short cut over the fields to Mytton. Strange memories of those days kept crowding on me as the way shortened, as the darkness gathered. How would the old place look? Had it kept the gray reverend aspect it bore on the day I drove from the door just thirty years before, friends, relatives, retainers, all gathered on the steps under its shadowy porch, watching me speeding away down the long avenue. Never did it seem so beautiful: its square central tower, broken into stories, each with its mullioned window and supporting pillars, flanked with great wings and other square towers; its two open cupolas, each capped with a stone eagle, rising high in the centre,—all of a gray reverend stone. How was it now with its broad court inside? its broad flight of steps, seen through the porch, leading up straight to the great banqueting-hall? Did the grass grow there now, and were its gray stones disturbed? How was it with its quaint old English gardens, laid out in long lines of yew-tree hedges, shaven smooth and straight as a wall? its broad walks and terraces, its round Dutch ponds and white leaden gods rising from the water, its grotesque sun-dials and devices, and dark cavernous aisle of ancient yews meeting overhead,

through which the sun's rays never penetrated? How was it with all these? Overgrown with weeds and gone to ruin? Question soon to be resolved, for we were now struggling up the east hill, over a little valley all sunk in darkness, where were lights twinkling, and where lay the manor village of Hurst Mytton, now all wrapped in darkness. I could hear the little stream that coursed through the valley, turning a few rude mills, rippling noisily as of old, just as we swept sharply round a corner and entered the broad open avenue, a good mile long, leading straight down to Mytton. With beating heart I could see afar off the dark mass standing out shadowy, with the two cupolas outlined on bluish-gray ground. Lights were twinkling up and down, and a red glow came through crimson curtains drawn close before the windows of the picture-gallery.

In a few seconds more the great pile was looming out over my head, and the driver was on the ground pulling at a bell. It rang out hoarsely, scaring some shrill birds that had their nest overhead. I was standing under shelter of the gray porch looking into the court. From open windows of that picture-gallery on the right was pouring a flood of genial light through a crimson transparency; prospect ineffably comforting to a lone wanderer's heart! I was walking round, looking up, with a strange feeling over me, at the great clock fixed in one of the towers, which used to chime tunes like Dutch carillons, when the door at the top of the flight of steps opened softly, and an old man with a lamp descended, bowing low to the ground—an old man with spare hair and ivory head. He peered

at me curiously with a restless, anxious look, shading the lamp with his hand, and bowing with a certain stateliness. He presumed that I was one of his honour's friends come down for the Christmas. They had been expecting him long, very long, for a year and more. Perhaps I brought news or letters from him, or perhaps I myself—could it be? Here the lamp was lifted up, and my face searched with wistful inquiry. "True Sherburne face," he muttered. At the same time the cloud of old memories which had been floating round me since I first passed beneath the porch began to settle steadily down in the shape of a certain retainer who used to take me out far over the fells. "Will Dipchurch," I said hesitatingly. He started.

"Will Dipchurch, the steward, surely. Who knows Will Dipchurch that Will don't know? Let me look again. Can it be that young Mr. Nicholas who went abroad beyond the seas thirty years ago? Can it be?"

"It was," I said, taking his hand in mine, "poor Nicholas Sherburne, the wanderer, come home to end his days."

"I knew the Sherburne voice, the Sherburne face," he said; "so glory to God on this Christmas-eve for bringing you back under your own roof. I dreamt of this. I knew that another Christmas would not go by without some one of the old name being at the Grange again. Come in, sir; come in, for you must be tired after your long, long journey."

I followed him silently up the steps, and crossed the threshold into the banqueting-hall. It was dark,

and the lamp gave out a feeble light. But I could feel the chequered marble pavement echoing beneath my feet, and could make out dimly overhead the dark oaken gallery where, in old baronial times, musicians used to play. I looked for the famous antlers, spoils of old hunting days, hung up high round the hall, and found them in the old spot. I looked for the helmet over the yawning fireplace, where was a heap of red wood-ember flickering. I looked for the oak-paneling, dark and shining with age, running round; for the oaken tables, black and shining too,—and felt as if I had left but yesterday; for nothing had been disturbed.

“Look up, sir!” said old Will. “See how we have had the place dressed against Christmas—all as it used to be,”—and he held the lamp up high above his head. It was a wilderness of holly and ivy and red berries. Bunches of it round the oaken bosses of the ceiling, twining up the mullions of the windows, hiding every knot and twist. All those queer stone faces supporting the oaken arches of the roof, at which, in childish days, I used to glance timidly and with an awful respect, now leered comically out of ruffs and collars of prickly ivy, and the coronas all down the hall were now turned to the likeness of great holly bushes hanging from the ceiling. On sight of which Christmas livery, came the genial spirit of the season invading me tumultuously. The bleak white walls belonging to the Old Rodney Arms, encompassing me close up to that date, began to crumble away slowly.

Said Mr. Dipchurch, half to himself, and letting the light play upon his face with a rare Dutch effect, “I

knew this evening would not go over without the master's returning home. I dreamed it three times over the fire. Our garners have been filled, and the strong ale brewed, and the keeper has been over the fells with his gun. And to-morrow the tenantry shall come up for the feast in this hall, as they have done this many a-year; and his honour shall sit in the great chair at the head, as his father did before him. A glad day: I may say, sir, I hope, a jolly day!"

Mr. Dipchurch passed out with his lamp, I following, and led the way through the ante-room—where the guests always gathered before dinner—into the picture-gallery. I stood at the door looking down—for it was a long, long room, running full the breadth of the house—down to the far end, where were drawn close with heavy folds those crimson curtains, beacon that had shone out so ruddily on the avenue. Lining the sides, hanging out from the walls, were the tall, full-length Sherburnes, men and women for generations back—a roll chronological of every age. Often had they been read off to me by our ancient housekeeper. I could tell them truly, even now. Beginning with that frowning warrior just at the door, a captain and admiral at sea, in flowing wig and blue armour, who stands leaning on his truncheon, and pointing back eternally to a cloud. So, too, with that other worthy in the starched frill, doublets, and trunks, who had done good service in the Spanish wars. Next to whom I knew full well (for the black shadows hung over that region) was a peerless lady, one of Kneller's beauties—a shepherdess in the open country, with a crook, and

sheep at her feet. And so up that line I could tell them off in their order from where I sat. That famous Sir Ralph, in the Ramilies' wig and scarlet coat, pointing back, like the Admiral, to smoke in the background: he who had given such good account of the French in the Flemish campaigns. With other cavaliers and noble ladies of Sir Joshua's pencilling: all behooped, and in rich flowering silks. Half-way down, just at the great fire-place, I found an old oak-table and high-backed chair of the same spiral pattern drawn in close; where, too, was a shaded lamp, shedding warm soft light, and reflected on the shining oak-floor.

Saying he would return, Mr. Dipchurch passed me by softly; and, taking his way down the long gallery, disappeared in a black shadow which hung over the end. Then I drew in the high-backed chair closer, and stirring up the logs till they cracked again, fell to thinking how strangely it had come about that the wanderer was back again in his old home that night, of all nights in the year: an eve of jubilee to all men—vigil of tidings of great joy—which had brought round at last a sort of dull quiet and repose to one who had strayed much, and for whom there was to be now no more wanderings.

“Just as the hare whom hounds and horns pursue,”
(this was the weary yearning of another poor wanderer long since gone to his rest)

“Pants to the spot from which at first it flew,
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return, and die at home at last,”

under the shadow of my own roof-tree; given back again to that stately company on the walls. Ghostly company indeed! Cold, fleshless, and bloodless kinsmen; yet all that were left to me in the room of those real living ones who had been taken away one by one! The ghostly company had it nearly all to themselves now, and within a certain span of years were certain to have free, undisturbed range of the old halls. Stiffly and quaintly they might then come down and walk all day long, and all night long, to and fro, in stately dances, without so much as one to intrude on them. Strange, chilling feeling this, of being utterly wrecked and stranded upon one's own home; of being cast upon a lonely island in one's own house. They were all gone now: father, sisters, brothers—the cheerful, exuberant houseful! filling every corner of the old place with bright, beaming hope—with youth and spirits and eternal jubilee! But of this season especially, how this brightness of heart burst forth as in a torrent—sweeping with it friends and neighbours, kith and kin—drawing them all in under one roof, to be glad and make merry, and keep the holy festival with more glory than in any other spot on the face of the land!

With the cruelest aching of heart, with an inexpressible yearning, the lonely wanderer returned thinks of that time—separated now from him by gulf ever so wide. O thrice happy days, over which steals the soft golden light that hangs round things seen from afar! Most vividly do they come floating back upon me now, as I sit looking into the fire, making out the minutest pictures. It is as the mouth of a great arched

vault, with a high glowing mound of wood-embers crumbling down with sudden rustle, and taking all manner of fanciful shapes. And yet with every change I make out (oh, so clearly !) small bright figures, with faces familiar, and scenes long, long forgotten, but, by some mysterious power, evoked on this night, of all nights in the year. Though the clock in the court was now clanging out harshly nine, it did not break in upon these welcome visions ; and I still see pictures in the red wood-embers.

A crumble and a rustle of the ashes, and they slowly take shape, bringing out elements of one child's Christmas, long enough back now to have been rubbed out of all recollection, with one figure conspicuous, a good rough squire, heartiest of his kind. Christmas-loving, charity-giving, beloved of all friends and neighbours. Best of all fathers, with the gentlest beaming eyes. The truest imaginable picture of the old English squire. To my child's eyes the most benignant, lovable being upon earth. Still more of a superior being at this high festival, in keeping of which worthily he took such delight.

All were to be happy—all light-hearted. The poor fed and clothed ; none within a broad circuit round to have care or sorrow. I see the embers still crumbling and crumbling, and settle at last in the fixed shape of one special Christmas season, now good five-and-thirty years removed.

Figures flit past—figures well known and recollected ; awful personages to my young eyes. One, in old-fashioned blue coat and gilt buttons, top-booted,

with a hunting-whip eternally in his hand — Squire Hornby of the Grange. A rough, ready, and agricultural fellow, that tramped where he pleased in those great top-boots. A misty vision next, of gloom and awe thrown over young hearts, by feud and terrible strife breaking out between our father and rough Squire Hornby. Fierce looks, fiercer words, angry contention, followed by appeals to law, attended with unspeakable dread for the young people of the house, and all rising out of a petty dispute about a watercourse. Our father's gentle eyes would light up and flash as, pacing up and down the great room of an evening, he would declaim on his wrongs, and vow hostility to his neighbour. He would fight out the watercourse to the death in the courts, or any where he should choose. If it came to his last shilling, it should go for the watercourse.

We listened with frightened hearts, appalled at this terrible prospect, not being old enough to know that a watercourse, or right of way, are objects dearest of all things in the world to country gentlemen's hearts. After Christmas it would come before the proper tribunals. Then father should have justice done him. If not, he would go on to the House of Lords, and battle it out there. Finally, if beaten at all hands, he would sell every stick in the place (here his voice would grow tremulous), and retire to a foreign land to end his days. His enemy should not have that triumph over him.

It was getting on all the while to his favourite season; which promised to be as frost-bound and snow-clad as festival heart could desire.

Great stores of provisions had been laid in. Father was busy from morning till night in the furthering of that design which always lay nearest to his heart; namely,—that no poor soul in the parish should have a troubled heart at this famous season; but should be filled and made merry, and as warm as plenty of coal and blanketing could make him. Never was he so busy, so vigorous, so full of the genial holy spirit of the season. Each day that lessened the distance between him and the great day lightened this temper of his; until, at last, it came to be the morning of the great eve itself. I see in the red embers figures moving and flitting past indistinctly; genial faces lit up by honest glow; whitest snow covering the ground thickly. I make out that one figure, centre of all, moving hither and thither, rubbing his hands in glee; for there had reached him news that morning from high law authority, that all would turn out well for him in the matter of the watercourse. There was a great jubilee through all the house; most seasonable Christmas present, that horn of news!

That Christmas-eve wore on cheerily, until it came to grow dusk, and lamps were lighted: when I see some one riding up the long open avenue through the snow; some one to see the Squire, and wish him a merry Christmas, and who mentions as a bit of news that neighbour Hornby has that morning heard of the death of his only daughter in a foreign country, and was sunk and bowed down with trouble as much as a man could be. I see on that evening, when the long room is lighted up and the floor so polished that it re-

flects back the light—I see our dear father come in among us (over to this great fire-place where I now sit looking back into the past), with a little trouble on his face: then he walks about restlessly, talking softly to himself; then stops, and finally goes to his desk. I see him sit down and write hastily—we speaking together softly over the fire—and seal the letter with his own great seal; then send it off by a man on horse-back. Oh, how I have before me his gentle face, as he comes over again to the fire, rubbing his hands softly, with such a pleased look!

“Do you know,” I think I hear him say, in tones that make my heart thrill, “dear children, what was written in that letter?”

“That you were to win the watercourse, papa,” says my little sister, gleefully, “and beat that nasty Mr. Hornby.”

I see his face twitch a little. “No,” he says, gently, “we have done, now, I am afraid, with the watercourse—done with it for ever. Do you know what I told you this morning of Squire Hornby and his daughter? We are all happy here to-night—oh, so happy!—and shall be happier, please Heaven, to-morrow. So shall every body be about us, excepting a poor squire whose house is hung with mourning. Well, to him I have sent the watercourse, as a little Christmas present. Have I done right?” Then he looks round with those ever-gentle eyes upon his children.

And here, with sudden rustle, the wood embers sink down, and that picture fades away from me.

I am still the lonely outcast, sitting over the fire, with a most intolerable yearning for flesh-and-blood sympathy, which I cannot have now. Oh, for something to cling to, something to hold by—not to be so utterly cast adrift!

The old clock-chimes are again at work, tolling eleven; for a flood of small details have filled up that hour, which seems to have been barely a few minutes. These Christmas anniversaries at the old Hall were rare times: they make my poor heart ache thinking of them. Stir the logs; cast on a few fresh ones!

Here I am set afloat once more—tided far away, backwards; until I make out clearly other pictures, other figures.

Sent away to sea from the old house, at fourteen, having always a fancy for the naval profession; often, when tossing in my cheerless hammock, when roughly handled, as is the fashion on the ocean, I looked back to those happy Christmas days with a sickening, despairing feel. Often, when lying in dull idleness off a sickly African coast, the Great Festival has come round and been let to slip by without celebration, I thought how far away, in Mytton Grange, it was being kept with mirth and genial warmth. How about four o'clock, or so, the cold evening was drawing close in; and the daylight departing; and through the snow, which gave light enough of its own, hearty folk were tramping briskly up to the Hall; for whom there were beacons, in the shape of red patches of fire-light up and down the front of the great house, to guide them. Light enough inside, too, in the great Hall; where the

feast was set out, the grand annual Christmas feast, with the squire at the head of his table, from which not one was absent.

A rustle and collapse of embers, and I am set a-thinking of another scene one year later, when I was still upon the seas; but on the eve of being temporarily set free. I think of the ardent longing, that eager straining to span across the broadest tracts of sea and land; of hurried marches; of journeying homeward night and day, with panting, excited spirits, all to the one end, to reach home against the Great Festival. I think of that setting down of feet once more upon English ground; of that furious posting—whip and spur, double gratuities; of that nearing familiar objects, loved landmarks, and finally of the dark building so longed for, standing looming out, with a dark background, but with rows and rows of the old genial crimson light that set my heart a-dancing. Most welcome crunching of wheels upon the frozen snow as we turn up to the porch. I see the gate standing wide open, figures standing close, welcoming faces, with one gentlest in the world, and now radiant as an angel! Then shaking of hands by every body; by many I know not. Then a sweet mist for the rest of the night; long vistas down great halls; softest suffusion of yellow light playing on more faces crowding in on me. O night never to be forgotten! Rather let it sink and be lost in those red embers now once more falling in so suddenly.

How I long for gentle sympathising faces, something that can feel for, feel with me! Here about me

are the old walls, the old rooms, the long halls, just as they were then. Here is the ivy and the holly, and red berries thick overhead, garnishing every corner and cranny, hiding close every projecting bit of oak, of stone; all just as it was then. Here were the garnerers full to overflowing, as the old steward had told me; the stores laid in, the feast set out. To-morrow would be the famous Christmas morning come round again. To-morrow the friends and neighbours would come in crowds and fill the great hall, just as of old. There they would sit, far down along the sides of the long tables, bright happy faces in two rows, all looking to that place at the head where the squire was sitting; songs of welcome, glad words,—long life and prosperity to the master, returned at last, the head of the old family. There were good hearty families living about,—many who had known the old squire (so the steward had told me)—who would be glad to take by the hand, to know and love his last descendant. They abounded, they waited but for a sign; to-morrow would be the glad day. These things were no dreams, no idle fancies; to-morrow they would be realities. Why should I cut myself off from such cheering hopes? There might be some bright days in store for me, after all.

Down they had crumbled once more into a white heap of ashes. They were dying out, and with them the night. For, just at that instant, I hear afar off most faint tinkling as of silver fold-bells, as though there were shepherds then abroad in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Rising up and going over softly to the windows, I see that the snow has been

falling thick upon the ground, and can observe out afar off, beyond the white fields in the direction of Mytton church, a little red speck; by which I know that the ringers are in the belfry, ringing in the Christmas morning. Oh, sweetest, most musical Christmas carols! I take them up with me still sounding in my ears as I go to rest, and fall to sleep to dream hopefully.

I woke on Christmas morning to the same merry tunes to find my dream realised. Mytton Grange never saw a jollier day. Old Dipchurch had thoroughly preserved its traditional Christmas; for not a tenant, nor a tenant's wife, nor son, nor daughter, was absent; and many a neighbour, whom the busily-spread news of the new squire's arrival had reached, came also to give him a right hearty English Welcome Home! If Captain Sharon, and the gray shrivelled old clerk, could only have been with me!

THE END.

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